

THE ORGANISED THEATRE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

MRS. MARTIN'S MAN
ALICE AND A FAMILY
CHANGING WINDS
THE FOOLISH LOVERS

PLAYS

THE MAGNANIMOUS LOVER
MIXED MARRIAGE
JANE CLEGG
JOHN FERGUSON
THE SHIP
MARY, MARY, QUITE CONTRARY
THE LADY OF BELMONT

SHORT STORIES

EIGHT O'CLOCK AND OTHER STUDIES

ESSAYS

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF MY ELDERS

POLITICAL STUDIES

SIR EDWARD CARSON AND THE ULSTER MOVEMENT
PARNELL (*in Preparation*)

THE ORGANISED THEATRE

A PLEA IN CIVICS

BY

ST. JOHN ERVINE



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To

COLONEL J. J. SHUTE, D.L., C.M.G., D.S.O.

IN WHOSE HOUSE, AT

HOOTON, CHESHIRE

MOST OF THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book has grown out of a series of five lectures which were delivered by me at the University of Liverpool in November and December 1923, as the Shute Lecturer in the Art of the Theatre. The substance of the book is identical with the substance of the lectures, but there is a great deal of material in it which was not in them.

ST. J. E.

The Organised Theatre

I

i

I PROPOSE, in this book, to make a plea for an organised theatre, but I shall not confine myself to that plea, for a theatre is merely a machine whose work depends upon the capacity of those by whom it is owned and operated. My plea, indeed, will be for such a theatre, but it will include the much more important demand for an intelligent audience. A theatre owned by the community will not be much, if any, better than the general taste of the community permits it to be, although it is likely, I think, to be better than the privately owned or, as it is sometimes called, commercially owned theatre, where the quality of the plays produced has a tendency in bad times to descend to the gutter. An audience of half-wits will not accept anything but a half-witted drama, nor will a man with a Chu Chin Chow mind easily be persuaded to patronise any other than Chu Chin Chow plays.

It is useless, therefore, to complain of the dramatists and the managers when the persons at fault are the playgoers themselves. In vain does the dramatist write, and the manager produce, plays which are neither vulgar nor soporific nor outrageous to the understanding when the audience is mainly composed of people who are vulgar or half-asleep or empty-minded. The inexorable fact of finance will speedily cure the manager, though not so speedily the dramatist, of that vanity ; and when he discovers that he can make a profit or pay his way only by producing plays which are close to the level of his patrons' intelligence, he will not be long in abandoning any intention he may have of raising the tone of the drama in order that he may raise the wind, even if the wind comes from the East and smells vilely. It might be argued, though I doubt if the argument be sound, that a manager could improve the public taste by producing plays slightly above it ; but that argument is maintainable only on the assumption that the manager wishes to improve the public taste, and that he can dip his hand very deeply into his own or someone else's pocket. Those who are desirous of leaving an institution better than they found it must be prepared to pay for their pleasure. The public refuses to be improved at its own expense, and will only agree to be improved, when it agrees at all, after some one has

spent his life or his fortune in the effort. The history of progress is the history of the heart-rending attempts made by determined individuals to overcome the sloth and opposition of multitudes obstinately resolved not to have any progress at all ; and no one who is not ready to suffer, and even to die, of discouragement—the one form of fatal disease which afflicted the He-Ancients and the She-Ancients in Mr. Shaw's "Back to Methuselah"—can ever hope to earn the misery and renown which is the reward of all those who have not left the world worse than they found it. Let there be no doubt about this. Popular favour is not commonly given to reformers, except posthumously or when the receivers are too old and worn to derive any pleasure from it. They may be stoned : they will certainly be derided and offensively described. The best that will be hurled at them will be such devastating names as "cranks", "highbrows", "superior persons" and "prigs". They may even be called "idealists", a word used synonymically, by Lord Birkenhead for "idiots". They will be asked why they are so solemn, and accused of pontificating. No one will ever call them jolly good fellows, for the reason, perhaps, that they seldom are jolly good fellows, nor will they be praised for their felicitous style and charming manners. But charm of manner is more characteristic of the

insincere than of the sincere, and is more commonly found in a Nero than in a John the Baptist. The Borgias could only have induced their guests to sit down to dinner with them by cultivating a charming demeanour which is rarely possessed by more virtuous persons. The reformer, therefore, must be prepared to forego grace when grace gets in the way of his desire. He will do well to keep his temper and to develop his sense of humour, if he has any, and to think of himself occasionally as one fool among many fools, and to remember that he is not the final repository of the world's wisdom ; but he can never hope to fulfil his desire if he spends his time in getting a reputation for charm and jolly good fellowship. Obstacles do not like to be removed—but they have got to be removed ; and that, roughly speaking, is all there is to it.

This book, then, will not waste time in being polite to persons who are not entitled to politeness. A villain will be described as a villain : a profiteer will not be called an entrepreneur ; and what blows are to be dealt will be dealt as vigorously as possible. I pray that I may be able to take blows with as much fortitude as I deliver them. If there are signs of arrogance in what follows, and I seem to make claims to an authority which I cannot substantiate, I beg only this of the reader : first, that he believe that the signs of arrogance

are not deliberately displayed, and are a defect of my manners, of which I am not always aware ; second, that he disregards the manner and has heed only to the matter ; and third, that he believe that no one realises so fully as I do that my claims to authority are disputable. I have tried, however, to say what I have to say about the theatre with as much validity as I can ; and there I leave the matter. What I have to say here will primarily be about the English theatre, because that is the theatre with which I have the greatest familiarity ; but it is possible that many of the things which may truly be said of it, may also be truly said of other theatres, especially in America, and if I seem at times to wander very far from the immediate subject of discussion, I shall retort to the complainers that my digressions are deliberate. My purpose in doing so may not be as clear to my complainers as it is to me—which is very likely—but if they will bear with me, they will, I think, find that my wanderings are not entirely without point.

ii

The English theatre is, at the moment, under a cloud. Earnest students of the drama, a body of persons who have probably done as much harm to the theatre as they have done good, speak very

disrespectfully of it ; and young gentlemen from New York and Indianapolis make a principle of ignoring it altogether. Two American authors, Mr. Kenneth MacGowan and Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, in a book entitled "Continental Stagecraft", informed the world that they had avoided England during their journeys of exploration, because, as Mr. MacGowan states in the preface to the book, "observation and reliable report showed little there that was not a faint echo of what was to be found on the Continent". Another American author, Mr. Stark Young, who seems so incapable of writing even a paragraph without a deprecating reference to the English people, that one begins to suspect him of having an inferiority complex, urges American dramatists and men of the theatre to look elsewhere than in England for guidance and inspiration. "The English race", he asserts in the "North American Review", "has obviously a talent for governing and colonising, demonstrated the world over, and for developing a governing class. It has a talent for sports ; *and, I think, a talent for poetry*, though I am aware that in saying so I should have to defend the racial conception of what the poetic is. But the English are not gifted to anything like the same extent in the theatre."

I invite my readers to ponder over the passage in Mr. Young's article which I have italicised :

the English race has, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". "I think" is good, but "talent" is better. Observe how dubiously Mr. Young makes his acknowledgment. He is not sure that the English have a talent for poetry: he only thinks that they have. He would not be surprised to hear that they have not. If he were asked to "defend the racial conception of what the poetic is", he half suspects that our talent for poetry would disappear, and we would be left with no more than two talents: one for government and colonisation, and the other for sports. I believe in bringing generalisations down to the level of particular examples. I propose, therefore, to particularise Mr. Stark Young's remarkable admission. Chaucer had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Shakespeare had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Milton had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Shelley had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Keats had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Wordsworth had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Browning had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". Tennyson had, "*I think, a talent for poetry*". A whole host of such minor poets as Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvell, John Donne, Herrick, Byron, Swinburne, Coleridge, William Blake, Matthew Arnold, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Yeats, Kipling, Masefield, de la Mare and their successors—all these

had, "I think, a talent for poetry". Mr. Young is right: they had. It is true that Voltaire thought that Shakespeare was a semi-savage and that Milton was a fool, but then Voltaire had no talent at all for poetry, and very little for drama, and perhaps, therefore, we may disregard his judgment. All these Englishmen had a "talent" for poetry, just as Beethoven and Mozart and Wagner had a "talent" for music, and Michael Angelo and Rubens and Velasquez had a "talent" for painting, and Jesus Christ and Buddha and Mahomet and Confucius had a "talent" for religion. There has, in short, been a procession of poets through England such as has never passed through any other land, for poetry breaks out of the English people almost as easily and as naturally as pep breaks out of Mr. Sinclair Lewis.

I have referred at that length to Mr. Young's opinions, not only because he is a very able critic—a trifle too ecstatic, perhaps, about the Italians, and a trifle too easily irritated by the English—but also because he is intellectually at the head of the group of critics who profess and propagate the dramatic theory, made in Germany, which is known as Expressionism, a theory to which explicit reference will be made in a later section of this book. But I am uneasy in my mind about Mr. Young. He disbelieves in the value of the English theatre to the rest of the world, but when

I read his dubious pronouncements on English poetry, I find myself wondering whether his pronouncements on English drama have any greater force behind them. We may agree with him that the condition of the English theatre and of the English drama—two very different things, although some critics seem unable to distinguish between them—is not so healthy as it might be, and be glad of any criticism which will help to restore them to health ; but we are entitled to look with suspicion on gentlemen who assert either that they would be better dead, or that they never were alive. Our suspicion is increased when we survey the theatre throughout Europe. We certainly have not had much occasion for boasting in our theatre since 1914, but we have had as much occasion for it as our neighbours on the Continent, and in some cases have actually had more occasion for it. We may feel happy about our theatre when we compare its record in the past thirty years with that of the French theatre in the same time. Our theatre is suffering badly from the effects of the War, but the French theatre was in the throes of pernicious anæmia before the War began. We, at all events, do realise that our theatre is not well, but the French, who are and always have been, the most insular people in Europe, are so far from realising the sterility of their theatre that they will hardly consent to look at the drama

of other nations. Fewer foreign plays are performed in Paris than in any other first-class capital. Even M. Anatole France, that fine figure of a writer, lately confessed, almost with a snigger of self-satisfaction, that he had not read any of the novels of Mr. Thomas Hardy! There are varying degrees of health in the European theatre, but nowhere is it any greater than it is in England, and there are places in Europe where it is definitely less. Our dramatists are able to range into other languages: they still influence the minds of other races, and there is no reason to assume that they will not continue to hold authority in the theatres of the world. A race which is prolific in poets is likely to be prolific in dramatists, for there is an affinity between the poet and the dramatist, not, perhaps, easily explained, but, nevertheless, old and durable; and the English race has been prolific in both. Mr. Young, in urging the American man of the theatre to free himself from the dominion of the English man of the theatre—a plea with which we can sympathise, since the American must some day stand on his own feet—declares that the English people have no natural aptitude for “the art of the theatre”:

How much resource has the English theatre for the expression of English living, of all living if you like? In England how much of the abundance of life swells up and speaks through the forms of the theatre? As for dramas, I mean not separate plays so much as the possibility of

expressing life in terms of the theatre. I mean not so much single instances of acting, but the possession of those attributes that go to make acting a complete and significant art. I mean not the mere occurrence of excellent settings, but the gift for expressing our visual experience in terms of the theatre and for making that expression significant.

I will confess that much of what is contained in that quotation from Mr. Young is unintelligible to me. He has the Expressionist's habit of running as hard as he can from anything definite, and covering up his retreat with a smoke screen of vague words. Indeed, the habit of airy generalisation is so ingrained in Mr. Young that he discusses the races of mankind as easily as if he had created them : as in this passage, for example :

Outside the single field of their comedy, English acting is poor compared to almost any of the Continental. It has no style compared to the French ; no realism compared to the Russian ; no warmth or translucent actuality, no beautiful fluidity, no magnetism, compared to the Italian ; no lyrical fervour, romantic flexibility, and swift clarity of results compared to the Spanish. . . . The English actor has very little of the vitality, the physical and mental animation, the style, the magnetism, the free and flowing rhythm, and a kind of poignant impulse and passionate eloquence of humanity, that are the sources of a great art of acting.

I am an audacious person myself, but even I would hesitate to dash off the races of mankind in a few sentences as Mr. Young does. I do not know what his age is, nor how extensively he is acquainted with the English, French, Italian,

Russian and Spanish peoples, to say nothing of his own, but if one were to judge him by the last of these quotations from his writings, one would be compelled to believe that he is the original He-Ancient of Mr. Shaw's "Back to Methuselah", and possessed of an intimate knowledge of all the races he describes—unless, of course, one concludes that he is merely being eloquent. There is little room left in the territory of art for the English, when Mr. Young has polished them off. They can colonise, and govern, and play games, and they have a dubious talent for poetry, and some of their actors have a small ability for the performance of comedy—but there their virtues end. "We must remember", he says,

that we [i.e. the Americans] do not look just now at a drama for its special and unique merits. We look to it as a possible influence for our own; and such a possibility depends on the gift it shows for expressing its matter in terms of the theatre, and on its gift for form that is significant as a dramatic vehicle. In this sense there is always on the Continent a dramatist who is better than his English competitor in the same kind. Congreve, for all his fine ear and literary gift, is far inferior as theatre to Molière, as are Sheridan, Goldsmith and the like. Pinero in the same field of thought and life and method is nothing to Ibsen. Galsworthy, for all his poise and ease and his equable cricket, is a mild form of a dozen Continentals; by the side of Chekhov his realism is like an invitation to tea; by the side of Strindberg, Galsworthy is like playing cribbage with the beadle . . .

comparisons which, I break the quotation to say, mean exactly nothing at all. Mr. Young goes on :

For a flowing and sensuous rendering of the rich and tragic splendour of men and passions and cities, D'Annunzio has found the dramatic expression. The remarkable work of John Synge follows him at a distance. For the macabre and heroic and wilful and witty and romantic there is Benavente. Compared to what the Russians can say of life's warmth and greyness and depths of suffering, Stanley Houghton and the rest of the Manchester School of dramatists are like milking cows on a field of battle. These boasted Manchester realists have developed a kind of problem method of their own, no doubt; but they remain sterile in their monotony. . . .

And so on, with a pat on the head for Sir James Barrie, and a nod of kindly condescension to Mr. Shaw.

Mr. Young omits to state who these "boasted Manchester realists" are, and he does not tell us who boasted of them, but our desire for information on these matters is forgotten when we try to decide whether his comparison of them to the remarkable feat of "milking cows on a field of battle" is more graceless than it is senseless.

iii

Observe the method employed by Mr. Young. He chooses a dramatist of the first rank, outside England, for comparison with a dramatist of the second or even the third rank, inside England. Stanley Houghton, who died at the age of thirty-two, is vaguely compared with "the Russians", and specifically with Anton Chekhov, who died at

the age of forty-four. The method is a singularly unfair one. Houghton was a young Manchester clerk, who spent his evenings in writing plays. One of them, "Hindle Wakes", obtained a fleeting popularity because of a youthful vigour and audacity in its expression and theme. It was not a profound piece, nor had it any literary distinction, but it was theatrically effective, and it had, for the time when it was written, some freshness and force, because it dealt with a topical question of sex relationships in a direct, natural, sincere, and unusual manner. Two or three years after it was performed for the first time, Houghton, who in the meantime had written two plays which were dire failures in every respect, died. He could never, I think, have become a great dramatist, but he would probably have become a very competent one. Whatever our opinions on that point may be, this fact remains true, that Houghton died before he had time to develop his powers. Yet Mr. Young measures him against a much greater man, Chekhov, who lived for twelve years longer than Houghton did, and therefore had that much more time in which to grow—and even measures him against the entire body of Russian dramatists! This is not criticism at all: it is abuse.

Mr. Young's second trick consists of "leaving out" of consideration any English author who

proves awkward for his argument, or evading the trouble which such a writer is likely to cause him by asserting that he belongs, not to England, but "to the world". In this manner, Shakespeare, the most English of men, belongs to the world, and is left out of consideration. Synge, too, seems to belong, "at a distance", to the world, and to be left out of consideration—unless, indeed, Mr. Young's mind has been fuddled by the doctrine of Sinn Fein and he believes that Synge owed no debt to England. In the region of stage decoration, Mr. Gordon Craig is discovered to belong, not to England, but "to the world", and is left out of consideration. Only those, in fact, who can be used, fairly or unfairly, for Mr. Young's purpose of proving that the English people are incapable of producing any meritable thing in the theatre, are "left in": But Mr. Young's comparisons are too odorous: the flaws in them are too easily detected. We may concede to him that Congreve "is far inferior as theatre to Molière", not in spite of, but because of, "his fine ear and literary gifts"—for a too literary phrasing in a man's dialogue ruins it on the stage—but we cannot as easily concede to him that Sheridan and Goldsmith, especially the first, are inferior to him as theatre; and we are entitled to ask why, Mr. Young omits to mention that the tradition of Molière has entirely ceased to be influential in

the French theatre. Sheridan is more alive in the English theatre to-day than Molière is in the French theatre. There actually are signs that the influence of Sheridan in the English theatre is reviving, but there are no signs of a revival of the influence of Molière in the French theatre. Mr. Young carries his argument that the English people have no natural aptitude for the theatre, and that "there is always on the Continent a dramatist who is better than his English competitor in the same kind", so far as to assert that "even Shakespeare handed on no dramatic form that later dramatists have been able to use". He refrains from pointing out that the form used by Molière is now obsolete in the French theatre, whereas the form used by Shakespeare has actually been the inspiration of the very group of dramatists who find most favour in the eyes of Mr. Young, namely, the German Expressionists, as well as the very different group of persons who manufacture moving-pictures. What is the theory of the Expressionists in the matter of technique? It is that a play shall be written in a large number of varied scenes. Mr. Kenneth MacGowan, a critic of the same school as Mr. Young, in "Continental Stagecraft" declares that the play of the future will consist of "loose, free scenes", a loose but not inaccurate description of the Shakespearean technique. On this single point of craftsmanship

—the ability to make an effective play—I deny that there is any dramatist on the Continent who can equal the skill with which Shakespeare made the Trial Scene in “The Merchant of Venice” or Sheridan made the Screen Scene in “The School for Scandal”. No one has ever made a play with such richness of craft as Shakespeare made “Hamlet”, a fact which is made obvious to anyone who sees the play performed in its entirety. There is no Frenchman, not Sarcey, nor Sardou, who is the equal in technique of Sir Arthur Pinero or of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, and I have yet to see the Continental play which contains an act so cleverly contrived as the first act of Sir James Barrie’s “What Every Woman Knows”, or Mr. Lennox Robinson’s “The Lost Leader”. I leave Mr. Young in his admiration for D’Annunzio, of which no more need be said than this, that it is not shared by the Italian people, who rightly regard Pirandello as the only great dramatist they have. But I cannot refrain from commenting on the singular statement that John Millington Synge—strangely excluded from the company of English dramatists—followed at a distance in the wake of D’Annunzio. Synge did nothing of the kind: he was a decadent descendant of the Elizabethans, more akin, perhaps, to Marlowe and Ford than to Shakespeare. There is no affinity whatever between him and the Italian author.

iv

Mr. Young, having abolished the English actor and the English dramatist, next proceeds to abolish the English audience. "The English nature", he assures his readers; "mistrusts the theatre". "There is something still in the mass of Anglo-Saxons which is hostile to the very stage itself". But this is a hostility which is not Anglo-Saxon or English at all: it is Christian. The whole Christian organisation since the time of the Romans has been antipathetic, if not actually, opposed, to the theatre. The troubles of the mummers were experienced in medieval times, not only in England, but all over Europe, and the antipathy to them survives throughout the Continent and also in America to a degree which is unknown in England.¹ To this day, Roman Catholic priests are prohibited from visiting theatres in the places where they work, although I believe they may do so in other places; and this prohibition is made on the ground that the sight of a priest in a theatre might be considered unedifying for the laity. I believe I am right in saying that it is universal in the Catholic Church, but even the Nonconformists in England have not formally prohibited their ministers from theatre-going.

¹ This social ostracism of players is a recurrent part of the theme of many of Benavente's plays.

A man is not treated as a social outcast in England because he is an actor, nor is a woman rejected from the society of respectable people because she is an actress. There are critics who consider that the toleration shown to players in England is bad for them, since it makes them more anxious to be Society persons than to be actors and actresses, but that is an opinion which is not particularly impressive and is not immediately the matter of discussion. The point is, that membership of the theatrical profession does not, in England, involve a man or woman in social obloquy, whereas the converse of this is true in nearly every country in Europe, and certainly in the United States of America. Much of the Puritan antipathy to the theatre and to the theatrical profession was due to precisely the same cause as a great deal of the Early Christian antipathy to them. Actors and actresses are very conservative people, and are invariably on the side of the authorities, even when the authorities do not hanker for their support. The theatre depends largely on the patronage of the rich and the powerful. These facts make the people of the theatre more likely to take the part of those in office than of those who aspire to office. The Red Flag will be waving over Buckingham Palace long before it waves over Drury Lane. The whole of the theatrical profession, such as it was, was closely

allied with all the things and all the people most disliked and opposed by the Early Christians. The whole of the theatrical profession in England, for very good reasons, was on the side of the King in the quarrel with the Commons. Wherever there was a losing battle to be fought, in the Roman Empire or in the England of the Stuarts, the theatrical profession fought it, partly through an incurable inability to distinguish between the right side and the wrong side, but chiefly because the losing side happened to be the one which was busy buttering the theatrical profession's bread. All practitioners of the arts, given freedom for the practice of them, are inclined to support the authorities and the aristocracy for the very human reason that the authorities and the aristocracy support them ; and the theatrical profession, more than most practitioners of the arts, are inclined to do this, and with better cause than any of them. It was to the Court and the monarch that the Elizabethans turned for support in their conflict with the City authorities, who were striving either to eject them from the City or to suppress them altogether ; and when the time came for the great struggle between the Commons and the Crown, the theatrical profession, remembering where their gratitude lay, threw in their lot with the King, and were punished for their loyalty by a period of total prohibition from the practice of their craft.

There is, then, something more than Anglo-Saxon thick-headedness to account for the disregard in which the theatre has, in the past, been held ; and Mr. Stark Young is not doing himself justice when he charges a section of the human race with an hostility to it, which has been felt in greater or equal degree by the whole of the civilised community, and is still felt, in his own country and in others, far more deeply than it is in this one. In China and Japan it is actually a social disgrace for a man or a woman to be a member of the theatrical profession, and so it is in some European countries. But, says Mr. Young,

London does not, like Madrid and Rome and Milan, take the theatre seriously by taking it naturally, taking it as a part of the day, a thing like love, food and daylight, that one accepts as a matter of course, a place where whole families sit together, children grow up out of their nurses' arms, and the day's life is renewed in an easy and vivid and moving embodiment of it.

I should hope not, indeed. If we are to assume that this quotation from Mr. Young is not mere windy verbiage, we may retort that we have no wish to see the theatre in possession of nursemaids, with babies spilling all over the stalls in a strenuous effort to grow out of their nurses' arms, and add to this a suggestion that the theatre does not seem to us a place where families should sit together, if, indeed, there is any place where

families should sit together. We are sufficiently cursed with young women who steadily munch chocolates through the performance of a play, and have no wish to see whole families consuming their evening meal in the pit. The suggestion that because Italians and Spaniards go to the theatre in family parties, and the English do not, the Italians and the Spaniards are therefore more in love with the theatre than the English, is one which has only to be stated to be disbelieved. What, when we have disentangled the thought from the rhetoric, does it all amount to? Merely this, that the method of going to the theatre in Italy and Spain differs from the method of going to it in England. How this fact can be employed to demonstrate some superiority of the Italians and the Spaniards over the English is a mystery which completely baffles me. When I see crowds of people standing for hours in queues outside West End theatres, sometimes in bitterly cold and wet weather, I cannot help thinking that they have a love for the theatre which is almost fanatical.

v *

I belong to a generation which is deeply discontented with the condition of the contemporary English theatre. This book is a sign of that

discontent. But while we recognise and acknowledge that our theatre is not what we should like it to be, we resent these assertions that it is an empty theatre, that it always has been an empty theatre, and that it is likely for ever to be an empty theatre. England, for six centuries, has been the scene of continuous experiment in the theatre, ranging from an epidemic of experiments in the Middle Ages through the great break with classical drama made by Shakespeare when he extended the territory of tragedy and substituted humanity for homiletics and people for machinery, to the development of the comedy of manners in the eighteenth century, and the development of the comedy and tragedy of social criticism in our own time. There is no department of theatrical enterprise in which the English people have not taken a pioneering, and sometimes an original, part of the highest distinction. I have referred to the breach made by Shakespeare in the classical drama, a breach only now being entered by the French. Congreve and Sheridan fashioned a form of comedy which is still the model of its kind. Goldsmith made a tremendous break with the tradition of his time when he created the comedy of natural manners, and was called a low and vulgar fellow for his pains. Tom Robertson, although he seems of small account now, was an unusually audacious adventurer in his day.

Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero immensely improved stage craft "in terms of the theatre", and we are still in their debt for what they did. Oscar Wilde and Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy, in the most dissimilar ways, gave great increase of reputation to the theatre. I do not myself regard Wilde as a great dramatist—indeed I think he was rather a poor one—but he set a fashion and revived a tradition, and is certainly an influence on the Continent. Nor do I regard Mr. Galsworthy as a dramatist of the highest rank—in my judgment, for what it is worth, he is a greater novelist than he is a dramatist—but when Mr. Stark Young describes him as "a mild form of a dozen Continentals", he is talking what, if this were not an academic occasion, I should call pure piffle. Who are the dozen Continentals who are so superior to Mr. Galsworthy? And why is it that he is one of the most popular dramatists in Austria, Germany, Russia and Sweden, if there are at least a dozen men scattered up and down the length of Europe of whom he is but "a mild form"? For note that Mr. Young is not content to describe Mr. Galsworthy as an inferior dramatist, but actually describes him as an inferior imitator of "at least a dozen Continentals". We have occasion to feel perturbed about our theatre—and I for one have not been reluctant to express that feeling—but there is no

occasion to feel so perturbed about it as Mr. Stark Young and his school in America would have us feel. Our heads may be bloody, but they remain unbowed. When we are informed that the theatre of our country is of no consequence to the rest of mankind or even to us, we may retort on our detractors by asking them where they can find a nation which has produced in three centuries, three dramatists of the eminence of Shakespeare, Sheridan and Shaw. In that period we have produced great actors and actresses of a range and variety that may be equalled, but can hardly be excelled, by the range and variety of actors and actresses in other lands ; and we are entitled to remind our critics that English actors not uncommonly displayed their craft in the days of Shakespeare before the judges of many of the capitals of Europe. When we come down to the minor matter of stage decoration, we are able to cite the names of men, beginning with Inigo Jones and John Shute, and ending with Gordon Craig, who can take their place in the company of the highest practitioners of their craft. We may even go so far as to assert that the whole body of modern stage decorators derive from one Englishman, Gordon Craig, the son of a mother who is herself not easily equalled as an actress of comedy.

It is a fact that the English theatre is not at this moment making that impression on the uni-

versal mind which it formerly made, or which it ought to be making ; but it is not a fact that the English theatre is entirely negligible, or that it was never of any importance. The whole European theatre is now in distress, and that distress is reflected in the state of the American theatre. In Germany, theatrical activity consists largely of crude experiments in production, most of which derive from experiments made years ago by Mr. Craig, and in cruder experiments in drama, largely neurotic, by overwrought people such as Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller. In Russia, the theatre has fallen to a state in which drama must be made to suit the dominant political theory ; and plays so divergent as " Hamlet " and Mr. Galsworthy's " Strife " are re-written so that they may not offend the minds of Lenin and Trotsky. In France, the drama deals, as it has dealt for at least a generation, mainly with one boring theme, irregular lovemaking, and there is even a danger that French acting, undeniably great though it is, may become stereotyped and formal. In Italy, except for Pirandello, there is hardly anyone writing meritable plays. In Spain, there is a fine dramatist, Jacinto Benavente, whose work fails to make a universal appeal because it is almost too national in character. Benavente, we may say, is too good a Spaniard to be a good European. Here and there, throughout the Continent, a man

of quality appears, but, broadly speaking, the general level is low. We are all sick of a great sickness, and we cannot hope to enjoy a healthy theatre until we ourselves are healthy again. But what a commentary it is on the state of the American theatre that in this time of Europe's sickness and disaster, American critics should still be running about the Continent looking for models and inspiration. If there is any health and strength in the American theatre, ought it not now to be giving Europe a lead? Are we to struggle from our sick beds to nurse a child which should be supporting itself, and perhaps giving us some help? The truth is that America ultimately was affected by the War in matters of the mind and spirit almost as much as Europe was, and that in this business of the theatre, as much as in any other, we are all members of one another, living on each other's brains. It is, perhaps, a foolish thing to let oneself be much moved by the scorn of Mr. Young and his friends, for the value of the English theatre to the rest of the world will not be decided by him or by me, but by its own worth. If there is any good thing in it, that thing will flourish and finally be recognised, though Mr. Young and his friends jeer at it until they are blue in the face ; and if there is no good thing in it, it will fade out of the memory of man, though I should spend what life

is left to me in praising it to the heavens. We will continue this discussion, therefore, not in terms of apology for the English theatre, but in terms of inquiry about the theatre wherever it is to be found, so far as that can be done. Whatever is wrong in the English theatre will probably be wrong in other theatres, and when we have found the cause of the trouble in one place we will probably find the cause of the trouble everywhere.

vi

But the reader will do well to remember that what is set forth in this book is, after all, the opinion of a fallible mind, and that his own judgment is probably as good as, if not better than, the author's.

II

i

MR. H. G. WELLS has described the present time as the Age of Confusion. The description may or may not be apt in relation to the whole of our activities, but it is apt in relation to the theatre. This is a time when there is much argument about "the art of the theatre", most of which is of a vaguely rhetorical and even flatulent sort, and earnest-minded young men from the Middle West of America take a trip through Europe in order that they may return to New York at the end of three months fully qualified to pronounce judgment on the drama of the world, past, present and to come. A school of theorists has arisen, led in America by Mr. Stark Young and Mr. Kenneth MacGowan, which declares that "the art of the theatre" is something entirely different from what mankind for many centuries has considered it to be. Soon after Mr. Young had asserted that it was a waste of time for the American student of the drama to pay any attention to the English

theatre, because our drama and our theatre were worthless in comparison with those of Russia, Germany, Italy, and Spain, I invited him to descend from the region of airy generalities and overwrought rhetoric to the more difficult region of concrete examples. Would he please give us particulars of the drama in other countries which he found so astoundingly superior to, say, the drama of Shakespeare, Sheridan and Shaw? Mr. Young replied to my question in the "North American Review" in an article, from which I have already made a number of quotations. The following quotation from the same article indicates what the Expressionist school of theatrical theorists mean when they write of "the art of the theatre"

Well, to that I might say that I know nothing better in those countries—that is to say, Russia, Germany, Italy and Spain—than Shakespeare and Shaw. But that is not the point at all. When he talks like that Mr. Ervine is doing exactly what nearly every other writer on the subject does. He does not talk of the art of the theatre, and seems unaware that there is such an art. He gets on to drama, which is only an element of this art; and for all that what he says about drama comes to, he might as well be talking of literature. . . .

Mr. Kenneth MacGowan, who is Mr. Young's colleague in the editorship of "The Theatre Arts Monthly" (an excellent magazine published in New York), has written more explicitly, or perhaps I ought to say, at greater length on this

modern theory of the theatre. His opinions are set out in two handsome books, lately published in England, one of which is entitled "The Theatre of To-Morrow", and the other, in which a distinguished American decorative artist, Mr. Robert Edmond Jones, collaborated with him, "Continental Stagecraft". Mr. MacGowan is capable of printing more tosh on one page than any other man in America or out of it, but he has immense industry and a gift for collecting information and putting it into a convenient form; and his two books are, therefore, both interesting and valuable to those who are studying the new movement in the theatre. Mr. Stark Young complained that when he talked of "the art of the theatre" I insisted on talking about the drama, which, he asserts, is only one element in that art. Mr. MacGowan, describing the dramatist of the future, tells us what all the elements of "the art of the theatre" are. The new dramatist, he says, "will think more in terms of colour, design, movement, music, and less in words alone"; and he quotes with approval this passage from Mr. Gordon Craig's book, "The Art of the Theatre":

The art of the theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of the dance. One is no

more important than the other, no more than one colour is more important to a painter than another, or one note more important than another to a musician . . .

a statement of values which, if applied to printed literature, would surely mean that the covers of a book are as important as the matter contained between them, and that the author of it is not entitled to more credit than the man who bound it. But is the acolyte more than the priest, or even equal with him? Is the priest more than God, or even equal with Him? What is this shoddy democracy which will not recognise that there is a hierarchy of minds and functions, but insists that the word is more than the thought it expresses, and the soul no greater than the body in which it is confined? I suspect that the dramatist of the future will disregard the prophecies of Mr. MacGowan, and will think, as his progenitors thought, not "in terms of colour, design, movement, music", but in terms of human conflict, and that he will not permit painters and decorators and fiddlers and electricians to give themselves airs in his presence about their subordinate functions in the theatre. The dramatist can dispense with the musician and the decorator, and even the electrician, and has on many occasions done so, but none of these, in the theatre, can dispense with him. And there can be no equality or approach at equality between dispensables and

indispensables. There may be a field-marshal's baton in every soldier's knapsack, but every soldier does not find it, nor would it be worth the trouble of finding if every soldier could. It may be very pleasant to believe that we are all equal in the eyes of God, and no doubt we are, but God has taken care to give us different abilities and functions lest there should be chaos. Even in heaven there are degrees of importance among the angels, and Blessed Michael is on a different footing with the Almighty from that of a common chorister.¹

¹ A young dramatist for whom I have high respect, Mr. Halcott Glover, in a book entitled, "Drama and Mankind" (London, Ernest Benn, Ltd.), takes a different, but, I think, wrong view of this point. He asserts that "the aim of drama . . . is expression of the public, by the public, for the public", an aim which would be better described as the "expression of the public, *by unique individuals*, for the public". Mr. Glover then goes on as follows: "Is everybody to write plays? One hopes not! Neither is everybody President of the United States. But he *may* be President. That is the point. Anybody may be Euripides or Molière".

This seems to me to be nonsense, apart from the fact that it is not true. Everybody may *not* be President of the United States, even if he be an American, unless he has the peculiar qualifications which enable a man to become President. But even if Mr. Glover were right in saying that "everybody *may* be President", he is hopelessly wrong in saying that "anybody may be Euripides or Molière". No one but Euripides can be Euripides, and no one, unless he has the unique essence which is genius, can approach the level of Euripides or surpass it. Mr. Glover may, of course, mean that we cannot know where a Euripides may be found, in a palace or a hovel, and if so, we are all in agreement with him. But he uses an uncommonly misleading way of stating a platitude. There is, however, too much of this neo-Democracy about for us to assume that Mr. Glover does not mean exactly what he says, that "*anybody* may be Euripides or Molière", and many seemingly intelligent persons go about professing to believe that if only the dustman had "a chance" he could be a Shakespeare. The dustman is a dustman because that is what he is fit to be. If he is fit to be anything else,

My retort, therefore, to Mr. Young when he complains of my confusion of mind on "the art of the theatre" is that the confusion is not in my mind, but in his, and that the art of the theatre is primarily an affair of drama and secondarily an affair of acting, and that all the rest is mere padding and addition. The illustrations were undoubtedly a valuable addition to Dickens's novels, but no one, except Cruikshank, has ever asserted that they were essential or equal to the novels, and *he* was out of his mind when he said it. Shakespeare can be, and has been, performed on a bare stage, or with curtains, or with heavy, realistic scenery, after the fashion of Sir Herbert Tree or Mr. David Belasco, or with the shadow devices of Mr. Gordon Craig. He has been acted by good actors and by bad ones before intelligent audiences at the Old Vic., and unintelligent audiences in the West End. And he remains supreme and undiminished. He was not indifferent to, but neither was he overpowered by, the decorations of Inigo Jones. He was prepared to accept, as any sensible man is, the assistance of all who are able to make his work look seemly and presentable, but I imagine that his sympathies were with Ben Jonson and not with Inigo Jones when these two quarrelled over the right of pre-

he will not continue to be a dustman, nor will he hang about waiting for someone to give him "a chance"; he will take whatever chances he requires.

cedence ; and I am certain that in heaven he will have some disagreeable things to say to Mr. Kenneth MacGowan about that gentleman's contemptuous dismissal of Ben Jonson as "a disgruntled playwright" who had dared to make attacks upon "the first great English scenic artist, Inigo Jones". At the risk of reducing Mr. MacGowan to tears and sending Mr. Young in sorrow to his grave, I assert again, with what emphasis I can muster, that in the theatre the dramatist is supreme, and that the art of the theatre is made by a hierarchy of whom the artists and the electricians are the subordinates. If my assertion is sound, then we are entitled to feel proud of the English theatre, since Mr. Stark Young himself admits that he "knows of nothing better" in Russia, Germany, Italy and Spain "than Shakespeare and Shaw", and, I would add, Sheridan ; but even if my assertion is unsound, and Mr. Young is right when he claims that "the art of the theatre" is made up of a variety of equal things, we are still entitled to feel proud of the English theatre, since it has produced men eminent and pre-eminent in all the elements of its art.

ii

And here I propose, for a while, to abandon the company of the new theatrical theorists and

survey the history of the theatre so that we may discover in what circumstances the drama grew to greatness, and in what circumstances it fell into a decline or perished. I do not propose to conduct my readers on a lightning tour through the entire drama of the world. I have neither the knowledge nor the ability which would enable me to do so, nor, I suspect, have my readers the patience which would help them to follow me. It will be sufficient for my purpose if I make a brief comparison between the drama of the Greeks and the drama of the Elizabethans, both of which are admittedly great, and were produced in periods of greatness. The four Greeks whose work in the theatre survives for us, Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, and the great Elizabethans, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and the rest, were not, as we sometimes imagine, solitary in their greatness : they were great figures in a great age. The common picture of a man of genius shows him sitting in intellectual solitude, surrounded by a mob of inferior persons, none of whom is fit to communicate with him. In this picture, the man of genius is portrayed as a sort of freak, a "sport" in the biological sense, unaccountably produced by a dull race which embarrasses him by its stupidity, and is embarrassed by his brilliance. There is actually an odd belief that a man of genius is born from a densely

stupid stock, on to which a wholly or partly demented individual has been grafted. From the union of a semi-sane person with a totally stupid one, a genius is derived! . . . This singular assumption is refuted by the facts of life. Men of genius are not born of stupendously stupid persons, nor are they commonly derived from a stupendously stupid race. It is, I think, true that men of genius have nearly always been the children of very, and even exceptionally, intelligent parents. It is also true that men of genius are most commonly found among the races which have the highest general intelligence. Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and the rest were not "sports" of nature, but nature's choicest creatures in a race of choice creatures. Men of genius, in short, will be most often found among people of fine quality, and least often found among people of poor quality. This is one of these platitudes which are so disregarded that when people think about them at all they acquire the appearance of a paradox. A man of genius is at once a sign of his own greatness, and a sign of his nation's greatness: he is the expression both of a unique personality and of a noble race.

In the two great periods of drama to which I have referred, the Greek and the Elizabethan, there clearly were fine races alive in the countries

where the drama flourished. They were not all instructed as we are instructed. The majority of them were illiterate and, in the Greek States, servile. Many of the blessings of progress enjoyed by us were not only unknown to the Greeks and Elizabethans, but unanticipated. But there was in Greece and Elizabethan England something which is not so certainly found in us, a spirit which exalted them and made them superior to mere education. They had not the wide acquaintance with pieces of irrelevant information which is possessed by so many of us, but they had an agility of mind which enabled them to cope with their difficulties and transcend them in a way which we cannot do. The Greeks used "liquid fire" against the Saracens far more effectively than the Germans used it against the Allies, and they kept the secret of it for an almost immeasurably longer time than we kept the secret of the tanks. If they were not so elaborately and conveniently organised by methods of centralisation as we are, neither were they so easily disorganised and ruined when some piece of the machinery was wilfully or accidentally thrown out of use. The Greeks and the Elizabethans took longer over their journeys than we take, and were not so well served in the matter of light, but at least their state was not totally upset by the temporary disbandment of railways during a strike, nor was

the community plunged into dark difficulties through the failure of the electric current. The very invention which makes life more convenient is the instrument by which it may be made more inconvenient ; and it may happen that an age can be great in machines, as our age is, and yet weak in men. I do not wish to be understood as belittling education, but I do wish to be understood as regarding education merely as an instrument which will be well—or ill—used according to the quality of the people who possess it. If the people are a fine people, then the education will be well and finely used, and will have fine results, but if the people are a paltry people, then it will be meanly used, and will have mean results.

Fifty-four years of compulsory education have almost delivered us into the hands of common-minded, greedy men in possession of cheap and vulgar newspapers—not quite delivered us, for the residual wisdom of this nation is great enough to save us from the leadership of Lord Rothermere. But we are sufficiently weak in spirit to make the job of humbugging us a tolerably easy one, in spite of our free and compulsory education. The late Arthur Clutton-Brock put the point sharply when he asked whether a really instructed and fine race would have been deceived for five consecutive seconds by a palpably insincere and unctuous scoundrel like Bottomley. The answer

surely is that a fine-minded and intelligent people could not possibly have been deceived by him, that the nauseous and sanctimonious stuff he wrote weekly in Lord Rothermere's Sunday paper must have sickened people of quality. It is idle to retort that every age has its demagogues and its rascals, but every age has not had universal education, and every age has not been at the mercy of such a man as Bottomley ; and in any event, the retort is an implied admission that education by itself will not save a man from deception. The puerile doctrine of inevitable progress in the affairs of mankind would, if it were true, compel us to believe that we are less deceivable than our fathers, but I doubt whether an Elizabethan would have been humbugged by Bottomley as millions of Englishman in our time were deceived by him. We are constrained to the belief that man does not march steadily from bad to good and from good to better, but that each generation has to begin again the business of making the world. And on the quality of the generation depends the quality of the world it will make. The gains made by several generations may be lost by one generation, although the loser is more highly educated than the winners were. Life is like the chart of a man's temperature, one day up, another day down, and unless we make a continuous effort to keep it healthy and normal, a time will come

when the temperature will drop to zero, and there will be no life left. Nations and empires have risen and flourished, and fallen and died. Greece rose and fell ; Carthage rose and fell ; Rome rose and fell ; Spain rose and fell ; Babylon and Persia and the empires of the East—all these rose and fell ; and who are we that we should hope to escape from what seems to be the common end of men and nations?

There is, I think, only one way, if, indeed, there be any, by which a nation can renew itself in mind and body, and that is by occupying itself perpetually with the welfare of the common people. We need not greatly concern ourselves about the men of genius—they will look after themselves—but we must incessantly concern ourselves about the generality of men. For it is out of the well-tilled garden of the common mind and the racial spirit that the fine flowers of genius grow.

iii

But what, you ask, has all this to do with drama? Everything. Drama is, of all the means of artistic expression, the one which most closely corresponds with the mental and spiritual state of the race. Pictures may be painted, music may be composed, statues may be made, and poems may be written without the aid of the crowd (although personally

I do not believe that they can), but plays can *not*. Please do not misunderstand me when I say that. I mean that the racial consciousness provides the atmosphere in which the artist breathes, and that a rarefied or poisoned atmosphere will have a maleficent effect on him, and may kill him. This is more true, perhaps, of drama than of any other art, for drama is the least individual of the forms of expression. A play is not a play until it has been publicly performed before an audience which has paid for admission to the theatre. The finest play that anyone has written is not so interesting to read as it is to see performed ; but however well that play may be acted, it will not be so impressive when performed before an empty auditorium as it will be when it is played before an auditorium which is crowded. The point here is not one of appreciation, but of atmosphere and actual contribution. Beethoven's Fifth Symphony performed to an audience of one will seem as fine to him as it would if he were a member of a crowd containing a thousand or more persons. When we go to the National Gallery and look at a picture by Velasquez, we actually enjoy it better because we are unlikely to find many people present. A novel read in solitude is more entertaining than a novel read in an assembly, and all of us prefer to read to ourselves than be read to.

None of this is true of plays. The crowd brings

something into the theatre which is essential to the proper performance of the play, without which, indeed, the play would be a dull and ineffective thing ; and therefore the quality of the plays produced depends to a large extent upon the quality of this mysterious something. When we remember the kind of plays which have been popular in England during the past ten years we may well wonder whether we are fit to exist at all. There was a family in Birmingham which came to London once a month for nearly five years to see " Chu Chin Chow " ! These demented people saw that melancholy entertainment more than fifty times. A gentleman, who had spent his vigorous years in shooting big game, spent his declining years in going to see " Chu Chin Chow ". He died of it. Hundreds of civilised and expensively educated persons frequently went to see this singular piece. They were, of course, entitled to do so if it was the kind of entertainment that appealed to them, but we cannot deny that a people which mainly nourishes its mind on that sort of fare must be in a feeble state of health—as, indeed, we and all the people of Europe were throughout and immediately after the War. When the vitality of the race was being poured out widely and wastefully in France and Gallipoli, what likelihood was there of an intelligent audience at home? Sickly people, because their palate has

been ruined by unhealthy food, prefer tinned salmon to fresh salmon because it has a nipplier taste. If you give good beer to a man who has been accustomed to the mixture of glucose and arsenic, which is now called beer, he will spit it out in the belief that he is swallowing a deadly poison. A better sort of entertainment was demanded by the soldiers in the field than was demanded by the civilians at home; and plays were widely patronised in the West End, which, if they had been performed by a Divisional Concert Party, would have resulted in the court-martial, and perhaps the execution, of the officer-in-command.

The residue of enfeebled and neurotic civilians which was left in England during the War tried to throw the blame for the profusion of twaddle in West End theatres on to the soldiers, by asserting that "the boys" wanted some relief from the misery and drabness of the trenches. So, indeed, they did, but the relief provided for them by their civilian friends was of such a character that they gladly went back to the trenches. I remember, when I was in hospital, that the "walking-cases" invariably returned to the hospital from a visit to the theatre with the same tale.

"What did you see?" I used to ask, because my curiosity about the theatre is intense.

" So-and-so ", would be the reply.

" Did you like it? "

" God, no! It was the usual drivel. Civvy-stuff! "

" Why do you go, then, if you don't like it? "

" Well, you must go somewhere, and there's nowhere else to go. You can't walk up and down the streets all the time, or keep on going for 'bus-rides. . . . "

Civvy-stuff! That was the name the soldiers gave to the kind of play that was popular in the West End during the War and immediately after the Armistice. Stuff for flappers and very old gentlemen! Stuff for the immature, the weak, the silly, the senile, the feeble and the crafty! And as the men of spirit and adventure and fine quality were killed off in France, and the theatre became more and more the happy hunting-ground of the civilians, " civvy-stuff " became predominantly the stuff to give 'em. The recovery from that state of affairs is slowly being made, but there was a black period when it seemed that recovery could never be made. Even now, our Royal Family remains in that black period. The Prince of Wales goes to see one revue a dozen, and more times. Neither he nor his brothers care for anything else in the theatre. When they or the King and Queen go to a play at all, it is because of some Court compulsion put upon them. I believe in the

monarchical system, for a Court and a King and a Royal Family bring colour into this drab civilisation of ours; but the chief excuse for a monarchy to-day is that it shall lead the taste of the people. Heaven forbid that we should have a drearily highbrow king, but heaven might at least grant us a king of average good taste. There are thousands of simple-minded persons who believe that a play is fine merely because the King and Queen have been to see it. The Prince of Wales can make the fortune of an entertainment by paying a visit to it. No one can estimate the influence which the Royal Family has on the taste of a very large part of the public, and it is obvious that if the King's taste is poor, he will be the means of debasing the taste of a multitude of his subjects. I am one of those persons who are very susceptible to the charm of the Prince of Wales—but I could wish that His Royal Highness were a little more catholic in his choice, and that he cared for fine plays rather more than he cares for trashy ones. It is a horrid thought that we are ruled by people whose taste is below the average, rather than above it.

We are bound, I think, in considering how to restore the theatre to dignity, to begin with ourselves. We cannot improve it until we have improved ourselves. Our theatre is what it is because we are what we are, and we are not now much to

brag about. The exhaustion caused by the War will not last. Already we are recovering from it. But the form of our civilisation has consequences more durable and wide in their effects than the consequences of the War. We are living in a system of society which has not yet done more than make a mess of people and of places. I do not doubt that the industrial system will one day result in a fine and even beautiful society, but so far it has done little but defile all that it touches. We happen to have lived longer in an industrial system than any other country in the world, and for that reason we suffer more seriously from it than other people do. More and more do we tend to crowd great masses of people into small areas which are noisy and dirty and unhealthy, and exceedingly ugly. Cities like Liverpool and Leeds and London and Wolverhampton and Glasgow and Birmingham and Warrington and Widnes and Belfast ought not to be in existence at all. In every respect, they are hideous and even revolting. Sometimes I think that Manchester was made on the seventh day—when God rested. In these crowded places men steadily deteriorate: their physique declines, and their nerves weaken and finally shatter. A horrible contagion of commonness spreads itself over a modern community until at last people are so accustomed to ugly things that they are incapable of realising that they are

ugly at all—are even capable of believing them to be beautiful.

It is easy to fall into the error of imagining that life in a medieval town or in a Greek State was a modified form of heavenly bliss ; but it is not necessary to fall into that error to believe that life then was in a much greater degree than now serene and livable. There was something in the people of those times which either is not in us or has been so obscured that it cannot be seen ; and that something, whatever it was, enabled them to express themselves finely and nobly in nearly everything that they did. When we have made all the allowances that can be made for awkwardness and inconvenience and even bad workmanship, this fact remains, that the architecture of other times resulted in a loveliness that seems altogether to elude us. The old houses and cottages and churches which delight our eyes undeniably have faults—the cottages, especially, as Mr. H. G. Wells never tires of telling us, are insanitary and inconvenient—but they have a beauty which our convenient and highly sanitary houses have not got. How many of us, offered the choice between a cottage of the old sort and a compact house in a compact city street—one of a hundred houses all exactly and meanly alike—would not infinitely prefer the inconvenient and insanitary cottage? When we travel by train and

are pulled out of a terminus in a great city through rows and rows of little, ugly houses that seem to have broken out like a rash on the earth's face, are we not profoundly depressed by the progress we have been making since our ignorant and insanitary forefathers were put into their graves? When we make the ghastly journey from Birmingham to Wolverhampton, or travel through the long valley which stretches from Leeds to Manchester, or look down on Warrington or Widnes from the railway carriage—and then remember Chester, or the village of Dunster, or the little red towns in Devonshire, or the stone-built villages of Dorset and Warwick, or the warm-tiled towns of Kent and Sussex—do we not feel that the industrial civilisation has made a mess of all that is decent in human life?

Once when I was travelling from Liverpool to London, I sat in a carriage in which a young Japanese, newly arrived in England, was sitting. He looked out of the window at the rows and rows of Liverpool houses stretching in long, straight lines from the railway track, and after a while he turned to his companion, an Englishman, and said: "Are those the factories?"

"No", the Englishman replied, "they are the houses where the people live"!

The area between Birmingham and Wolverhampton is the abomination of desolation: covered

with unsightly streets, full of blackened houses that were hideous even when they were not black, and gaunt factories, which almost boast of their ghastliness, and slag-heaps that pile themselves up for scenery along miles of befouled and devastated land. We have made mills out of meadows, and torn up fields for factories, and made the rivers an unsightly mess of mud and oil. All our progress has come to little more than this, that parts of our country which formerly were beautiful are now hideous. Such cities as Belfast and Glasgow—commonly and rightly considered ugly—are situated in very beautiful surroundings. One thinks of how lovely the long valley from Leeds to Manchester must have been before the industrialists came and made it horrible with their smoke and mud and machinery, and wonders that anyone is left with a sense of decency since such places can be tolerated. The great mass of our people come into the world and grow up and marry and beget children and die in circumstances of squalor and ugliness which would have been unimaginable to the Elizabethans or the Greeks.

That is the first fact we have to remember in this discursive discussion, that the majority of our people spend their entire lives in surroundings which are ugly and depressing, and that they can hardly escape from them. Man is not, indeed, subjugated by his environment, for his divine spark

can be fanned to a flame which will make him indifferent to it. The holy ones lived in caves and cells and kept their vision. But they were the exceptional sons of God, sent to be our exemplars and to encourage us to rivalry with them. The mass of us, though we may not be subjugated by our circumstances, yet are profoundly affected by them ; and a mean civilisation may fill our minds with a mean vision. Why is it that when we come to express our deepest feelings in some memorial, we express them in a form that is nearly always commonplace and paltry? Why were the people of medieval France and England and the people of ancient Greece able to build cathedrals and temples which humiliate us because we are unable to match their beauty? The War stirred us more deeply than anything else in our lives has stirred us. We saw thousands and thousands of our best men going out to fight for what seemed a worthy cause, and we saw them dying in agony and bloody sweat, and the deeps of us were moved. Here surely was something to exalt us, something which, when we came to commemorate it, must catch us up into some of the glory of the dead. And yet how meanly nine out of ten of the War Memorials commemorate our dead nobility? How poorly does the War Memorial outside Chester Cathedral compare with the cathedral itself! How unworthy

of Edith Cavell is the statue we erected to her memory outside St. Martin's Church! What has gone wrong with us, that in this time of our affliction and distress and profoundest grief we are unable to make better memorials than these? Is it not just to say that most of the War Memorials in England are an insult to the dead: factory-made things turned out of a mould for profit by speculators whose itching palm is their substitute for imagination? There is a poverty of the mind in England now which was not in England three hundred years ago. Something that was abundantly here when Shakespeare lived is not here now, and until we recover that thing we cannot hope to make our theatre or any institution we have abound with the indescribable joy of great life. What it was, I cannot say. It may have been a high fervour of spirit, but if I were pressed to say what I believe it was, I should reply that it was a noble and a manly religious faith.

iv

And here I digress to remind my readers that all drama had its origin in religious belief. The Nō drama of Japan began as a religious ceremony; the Greek drama was actually a religious service performed in a temple; and in this country the drama was once used in the English village by the

common English people as a means of expressing their religious beliefs in a jolly fashion. That drama flourished all over England, until the authorities organised the fun out of it, and replaced the knockabouts and native humours by doctrinal instruction and homiletics. We saw a similar suppression of spontaneous entertainment during the War. The soldiers in the trenches invented ribald songs, full of the sentiment of honest, healthy, lustful men, and sang them to the most dismal hymn tunes they could remember, partly because dismal hymn tunes are the most popular sort of music in modern England, but chiefly because there seemed to the soldier something supremely funny in the idea of singing Rabelaisian sentiments to tunes associated with mournful theology. All over France, men were gaily singing these unrepeatable songs, and there was hilarity in the trenches, even when there was mud and water. Then came a day when the authorities decided to organise concert parties—and very excellent they were—for the entertainment of the troops. The immediate effect of these parties was to stop the spontaneous singing in the trenches: the men made no more songs, but listened to songs made for them by gentlemen in Broadway or the purlieus of Shaftesbury Avenue. Our men swore dreadfully in Flanders, said my Uncle Toby, and he could have said, had he been alive, that

our men sang dreadfully in France ; but the singing and the swearing came from the hearts of those who had endured and were willing to endure, and they signified some native thing, some English mood that was quickening up to the great blooming of Elizabeth's time. I sometimes think that we are trembling on the verge of a great revival of religious faith in England, and that when it comes romance will come rushing with it. The dead who died in France cannot be content with this factory filth we call civilisation. We may hear them yet marching up the road, bloody from their wounds and stained with mud, demanding that the inextinguishable right of every man to have his fill of life shall not be denied to him. And who can doubt that the dead will get their desire?

III

i

THERE was a singular difference between the religion of the Greeks and the religion of the Elizabethans, to which I wish to direct attention, because it will be found plainly reflected in the two dramas. The Greek drama was the tragedy of impotence: the Elizabethan drama was the tragedy of power. Man, in the judgment of the Greeks, was the creature of the gods, who were capricious and cruel and even irresponsible, but man, in the judgment of the Elizabethans, had some choice in his destiny. This distinction, on its English side, is most clearly seen in Shakespeare, but it may be seen also in the work of his contemporaries. The Elizabethans, indeed, could hardly have thought otherwise, for freedom was in the air, and adventure and high enterprise and a gay zest for living. The temper of the time, however, is most truly displayed by Shakespeare, who, in an extraordinary and even inexplicable manner, nourishes the imagination and exalts the

spirit more generally and more lastingly than any other author.

He has not come to the supremacy without having his right to it frequently challenged. At intervals, a critic will demand that he should give place to a more learned or a profounder man than himself. He is charged with offences which cannot be denied. His mind is not so amply furnished with rich facts as the minds of many others, some of whom can take us to greater heights and depths and distances than he can. His work is often done in a careless manner, and he is too un-particular about the materials he uses. There are some who have a wider range of mind and emotion, and can take us on journeys of discovery which he never attempted. Some were original as he never tried to be, and could not, perhaps, have been. He adds little or nothing to the world's store of ideas. Darwin or an Einstein may change the habits of mankind, but no one can contend that Shakespeare has changed them, although a greater claim may be made for him that he confirmed mankind in its finer habits. Each of the great ones can claim a quality by which he transcends him—a quality of learning, of form, of thought, of discovery—but when all these claims have been made and acknowledged, the judgment is that his supremacy remains. There is a loveliness in his writing and a human immanence in all

his plays, which leaves him undeposable ; and we return to his work from studying that of other authors, convinced that in it we shall find veritable men and women, richly illuminated for our recognition and respect.

Æschylus and Sophocles astound our minds with the awful sorrow of some tragic figure far more overwhelmingly than Shakespeare, but we can touch the hand of Hamlet with more assurance and familiarity than we can touch the hand of Agamemnon, for we recognise the waywardness of a man in Hamlet, but only the formality of a faith about man in Agamemnon. The love of Romeo for Juliet stirs a personal emotion which is not stirred at all by the love of Paris for Helen. When Desdemona dies we are more moved than when Antigone dies. Lear claims our comradely pity with greater certainty of receiving it than Œdipus. Jocasta and Hecuba and Medea and Orestes and Hæmon and Philoctetes come to us, less as women and men than as cold phantoms created and doomed by dogma. For it is the whole point of the Greek drama that the characters are made by Circumstance to go in this way or in that, whereas it is the whole point of the Elizabethan drama that the action is determined by the nature of the people themselves. Agamemnon propitiates Artemis by sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia, and is murdered by Clytemnestra, his wife, in vengeance

for Iphigenia's death. Their son, Orestes, murders his mother because she murdered his father! . . . And so the cycle of the Æschylean drama runs round. Orestes was advised and urged to kill his mother by Jove's son, Apollo, but when the crime was committed, the Furies persecuted, not Apollo, but Orestes. *That* son of God went unpunished, although he was guilty. Æschylus leaves the divine beings unrebuked, and Euripides asks vain questions about their conduct (and is mocked by Aristophanes for daring to do so), but neither of them presents a man in any other shape or form than that of a governed and dominated creature, destined by insensitive and senseless deities to the committal of unnatural crimes.

It was inevitable that the Greeks should formalise their drama, not only because of the way and the place in which it was performed—as a religious rite celebrated in a temple during the feast of Dionysius—but also because of this doctrine of the determination of tragic destiny by an outside and thoughtless authority. A man acting under compulsion must behave in a formal manner. The steps to the scaffold are counted and controlled. So many steps in so many seconds from the cell to the rope. But a man left to himself, though he may walk for the most of his life in an orderly manner, has yet the liberty to act on impulse and change his mind and direction.

It is because of this faith in formality, despite the difference of their minds, that Æschylus and Sophocles and Euripides seem to us to be wearing exactly the same clothes and to be saying exactly the same thing ; and it is for that reason that they leave us in precisely the same state of dispassion. Contact is not established by Æschylus or Sophocles, and it is only established by Euripides when he violates the canon of the Greek law that a play shall be made after a strictly defined pattern and concerned more with action than with character and not made a vehicle for mere emotion ; but the method, whoever employs it, is not free from the monotony of a mechanical operation, and at its best it leaves us with the conviction that this sorrowful business has nothing whatever to do with us. Somehow or other, in the judgment of the Greeks, the incredible acts of the gods have to be justified to Man, who must be made to believe that the gods are in the right, however capricious and irresponsible and cruel and bloody-minded they may seem to be.

ii

And here we come on the great difference between the Greek and the Elizabethan drama : the tragedy in the Greek plays is an arranged one in which the characters have no decisive part. Theirs

but to do and die. But the tragedy in the Elizabethan plays comes straight from the heart of the people themselves. Hamlet is Hamlet, not because a capricious god has compelled him to move to a tragic end, but because there is a unique essence in him which makes him incapable of behaving in any other way than he does. He still has the human right to waver and to be wrong. He still can be doubtful about his purpose and slay Polonius in mistake for Claudius. He can hesitate and go forward, love and repulse Ophelia, twist and turn and offer to put his destiny, if it be his destiny, away from him. And because he can do these things, because he has the only sort of liberty that is of any service to a man, the right to make a choice, he establishes contact with us and makes us feel, as *Œdipus* and *Orestes* do not make us feel, that we share life with him. The Elizabethans derived their strength from the classic traditions, but they did not tamely submit to them. They took what they wanted, and bent it to their own needs and desires. Marlowe and Ben Jonson kept closer to the formal classic manner than Shakespeare did, but all of them had that wayward English quality which made it impossible for them to regard a man as without mastery of himself. Shakespeare broke all the laws. He cared so little for action, in comparison with character, that he made very slight effort to keep

his plots in a plausible condition. Any plot would serve for his purpose, even one so puerile as that of "The Merchant of Venice". He was not interested in machinery, but in people, and he could listen to the works of his plays creaking and groaning without a shudder running down his spine. He did not begin to write a play by thinking of a formulary, nor did he attempt to prove an argument: he neither made his people do this or that because religion or doctrine said they must do it, nor did he make them do this or that because he was anxious to prove a point of his own. He created his people and then he let them go their way. There are no cages in his plays, nor are there any fetters. Macbeth seems to be a doomed man, but he has the right to choose. Even while he is deliberating on the murder of Duncan he asserts that "we still have judgment here". He has

no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition.

When the witches announce the increase of honours he is to receive, Banquo reminds him that these may not be the decisions of a beneficent deity but the temptations of a malignant one.

And oftentimes to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's,
In deepest consequence.

These honours that the witches prophesy will come to him if he decides to do evil deeds, but he is not compelled to do them : he can refuse, and for a while does refuse, to do them. The evil choice is definitely made only after he has suffered the chastisement of his wife's valorous tongue ; and even then he still has time to hesitate and withdraw. " The fault, dear Brutus ", Cassius tells his comrade (and it is a sign of Shakespeare's deep discernment that the speech is given to Cassius) :

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings,

and plainly is this truth revealed in the life of Cassius himself, for his antipathy to Cæsar is manifestly mean in motive, and his downfall comes about because he has not the strength of character to rise to the level of his own abilities, but lets himself be governed and directed by Brutus, a man of inferior intellect, but higher character. All the misfortune that comes upon Brutus and Cassius, after the murder of Cæsar, is directly attributable to the misjudgment of Brutus, who, against the advice of Cassius, permitted Mark Antony to live and address the Roman mob from the pulpit in the Forum. It was Brutus again who insisted on marching to Philippi when Cassius, an abler soldier, urged that :

'Tis better that the enemy seek us :
So shall he waste his means, weary his soldiers,
Doing himself offence ; whilst we, lying still,
Are full of rest, defence, and nimbleness.

There are many instances of similar import throughout the plays, and they mark the capital difference between the Athenians and the Elizabethans. The gods of the Greeks were wilful and unjust and irresponsible and cruel and greedy and lascivious. "Why, Zeus himself", says Mr. Lowes Dickinson in his book, "The Greek View of Life", "is as capricious as the rest! Because Thetis comes whining to him about an insult put upon Achilles, he interferes to change the whole course of the war, and that, too, by means of a lying dream. Even his own direct decrees he can hardly be induced to observe. His son, Sarpedon, for example, who is 'fated', as he says himself, to die, he is yet at the last moment in half a mind to save alive! How is such division possible in the will of the supreme god?" There is more of the "mutable, rank-scented many" among the Olympians than among their creatures. The gods are without rectitude and men are without decision. Œdipus cannot cry aloud, as Hamlet cried, "'Sblood, do you think that I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me you cannot play upon me". Orestes, bewildered by

events, cannot say, as Banquo in his bewilderment said, "In the great hand of God I stand", and feel assured that God is just. It is this quality in Shakespeare which brings him nearer to our love and understanding than we can ever be brought to the Greeks. Medea, "sullen-eyed and full of hate", ceases to be credible to us when she destroys her children in order that she may avenge herself on Jason. She establishes contact with us when she falls into the divine rage of jealousy, but passes beyond our comprehension when she murders her babies. Either she is mad, in which event she is pitiable, or she is wicked, in which event she is insufferable. The sight of her flying off to heaven in a gilded coach outrages our sense of decency as much as her crime outrages our sense of humanity. Lady Macbeth remains within the human compass for the whole of the time that Shakespeare admits us to her company, but Medea goes out of it almost at the moment we catch sight of her.

iii

And just as Shakespeare differs from the Greek in his sense of God's justice and Man's will to choose, so he differs from nearly all his equals in his sensitiveness to human presence. Cervantes created a great human figure in Don Quixote.

No one who has come under the spell of that master can easily dispute the claim of those who assert that the Spaniard surpassed the Englishman in making a man. *That* man, at all events, was after the divine pattern. We need not now argue the point, for it is unarguable. The lean knight takes leave of his senses and possession of our love simultaneously. There he stands, undeniably high in the estimation of mankind, recognisable by all, of whatever be our nation, as a human creature. But we may doubt whether Cervantes had control over so much of humanity as Shakespeare had. When our Englishman's name comes into our thoughts, we immediately summon up a variety of men and women of such a richness of character as no other author calls to our mind. We have already noted the uniformity of the doomed creatures of the Greeks. Boccaccio makes us aware of singular circumstances and ingenious stories, but hardly makes us aware of particular persons. We catch in Chaucer much of the Shakespearean variety of men and women, and perhaps we may fairly assert that the Elizabethan was the son of the fourteenth-century poet, but we cannot feel the familiarity with the Canterbury Pilgrims that we feel with Shakespeare's people. And this is not because Shakespeare writes in an English that is more easily understood by us than the English of

Chaucer, nor is it because the plays are so much a part of intellectual life that we cannot hope to escape from knowing Shakespeare's people at least on nodding terms. It is definitely because we find more of ourselves in this man's work than we find in the work of any one else.

Why are Shakespeare's plays more familiar to us than Chaucer's poems? Chaucer was a great man, and his language, with a little trouble taken over it, is understandable enough. Much of Shakespeare's language is in the way of being hard to understand, and will in time be as difficult, perhaps, to our descendants as Chaucer's already is to us. The truth surely is that our familiarity with Shakespeare's people is not due to the fact that we have seen his plays many times performed, but that the plays have been many times performed because his people are able to compel us to be familiar with them. We have not selected Shakespeare for a position of favour in our affections out of caprice. He was not, in fact, appointed by us to that position at all, but took it by his own merit. We yielded the position to him because it could not possibly be denied to him. His plays are more familiar to us than the poems of Chaucer because they deserve to be more familiar. In the final judgment of mankind, there is no room for favouritism: there can only be inexorable justice. A man, in these judgments,

cannot be put in a place which does not belong to him: he must go to the place which is his. Explain it how we may, Shakespeare remains for most of us the man who fully understands and displays the variety of life. He sees much and sees far, and like all who see much and see far, he accepts the facts of our existence with courage and forbearance. Perhaps it is the singular sanity of him that stirs us most. Or maybe the good-natured tolerance with which he regards human activities. Here's a fat rascal called Falstaff, a greedy, pot-valiant and timorous rogue, who ought to be clapped in jail. And yet we love the fellow! It is not easy to say why we love him, but we do. And there is a wisdom in him that shakes us out of our self-sufficiency when we compare our virtues with his vices. What a speech was that which he addressed to Justice Shallow when they were discouraging together on the qualities desirable in a soldier: "Care I for the limb, the thewes, the stature, bulk and big assemblance of a man? Give me the spirit, Master Shallow". When we hear those words rolling off the tongue of the drunken knight, we feel that this is the wisdom of a man who has a claim on our respect even when he seeks to deny it himself. Again, when Bottom, after his amazing adventures, talks of what befell him in the magic wood, he is suddenly drawn, for a moment, out of the state of a be-

wildered workman into the state of a man who has been exalted. "I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was—and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was." The play is a moonshine piece, and as plays go, it is ill-contrived and, perhaps, silly, but it is full of lovely words and it keeps men in the semblance of men even when they seem to be asses.

How did this richness of language come into England in that rude and anxious time when the mass of the people were untaught and untravelled, and there was hardly any of the mechanical progress in which we daily delight? A man need not be guilty of the common habit of believing the best about the past and the worst about the present in saying that there was a fervour of the mind in England then which filled the whole of English life with a rich flow of high imagination and made the Elizabethan era nearly, if not quite, the greatest period in English history. At the risk of being tiresomely repetitious, I wish to assert

that this greatness was not of isolated individuals, but of the whole people. Wherever one looks in the records of that age, one sees the signs of genius. The poets, because of their great leader, come most easily to our knowledge, but they were not alone in their greatness. The translation of the Bible and the composition of the Book of Common Prayer were done by men of average abilities, but the average of ability then was so high that by comparison with men of later times, they seem to be men almost of genius. Music, an art for which, so it is said, we have no gift, reached out to greatness then. The foundations of this empire were laid in that age ; our banking was organised, our coinage stabilised and our commerce established. The very laws were written in seemly and understandable prose, an ability which seems to have passed out of the possession of parliamentary draftsmen, if one may judge by the confusion and rage to which landlords and tenants were reduced by the Rent Restriction Act.¹

¹ An interesting and amusing example of the barbarity of modern Parliamentary language was given in the House of Commons on March 3, 1924, by the Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. A member had asked the Premier to "reverse the policy of previous Governments by drafting new legislation in language which would be intelligible to the ordinary citizen", and Mr. MacDonald, geying that language, replied to the member in these terms :

"Any want of intelligibility in language in Bills in the past has been due to the complexity and intractability of the subject matter dealt with more than to any policy on the part of Governments. I should be glad if intelligibility to the ordinary citizens were more consonant with legal intricacies".

This language is not unintelligible, but it is appalling.

Greatness, in short, ranged easily through all departments of Elizabethan life. The merchants were worthy to be members of the same society as the poets. The people were fit to be subjects of the sovereign, and the sovereign was fit to govern them. Elizabeth was not notably fond of Shakespeare or of his comrades, but neither was she indifferent to them, for she was a woman of taste and culture, and could herself turn a Greek play into relishable English. It could not be said of her, as it can be said of our royalties, that she preferred the third-rate to the first-rate and that she never gave encouragement to men of genius. She was a fit daughter for the king who rebuked his dull courtiers with the assertion that he could make ten peers with a word, but could not make a single Holbein. That, indeed, was the true Renaissance spirit. A Pope could say of Benvenuto Cellini, "Learn that men like Benvenuto, unique in their profession, are not subject to the laws"—it would have become Cellini better had he not been so ready to take advantage of that indulgence—and the King of France was so sensible of a great artist's value that he ordered his treasurers to provide Cellini with whatever he might want. "Mon ami", said Francis the First, "I do not know whose is the greater pleasure, that of the prince, who has found a man after his own heart, or that of the artist who has found a

prince who allows him whatever he needs to carry out his best ideas." Philip of Spain had the wit to commandeer the brush of Valasquez, but when our royalties send for a painter, they send, not for Augustus John or a man of his quality, but for some pretty-pretty painter of lids for chocolate-boxes. No man of genius in our time has been encouraged by the Court. It may even be doubted whether the Court is aware of the existence of any man of genius.

It was not so in Elizabeth's day, and we are entitled to believe, when we observe how greatly the spirit of the Court corresponded with the spirit of the race that there was something uncommon and magnificent in a people who could compose, almost by chance, prayers so exquisite in their language as the third collect of Evensong :

Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord ; and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night ; for the love of Thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

This language is clearly akin to the language put into the mouth of Bassanio by Shakespeare :

And her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,

and indicates, or so it seems to me, that when Mr. Bernard Shaw represented Shakespeare, in " The Dark Lady of the Sonnets ", as a snapper-up of

unconsidered trifles from the common speech of the people, he was not greatly exaggerating the truth. It is a disquieting sign of our state of mind and spirit that we are proposing to "revise" these prayers because fine language—the speech of fine people—no longer has any meaning for our compulsorily educated population. If the revisers have their way, the Book of Common Prayer—observe that word *Common*, how significant it is—will be translated from the language of Shakespeare into the language of the "Daily Mail."

iv

And here I interrupt my argument to reply to the charge now, no doubt, being formulated in the mind of the reader, that I am attributing to the mass of the Elizabethans qualities which belonged only to their greatest figures. That precisely is what I am trying to do. My argument is that the common man, for whom the Common Prayer Book was made, was animated by the spirit which animated Shakespeare, and that he spoke the language of Shakespeare and the translators of the Bible, though not, indeed, with his and their supreme power or continuous certainty or beauty. We can find overwrought remains of that great common speech in the plays of John Millington

Synge, who listened at cracks in the floor to the conversation of servant girls and tinkers, just as Mr. Shaw has imagined Shakespeare listening to the speech of his contemporaries ; and while he listened he heard the echoes of a great age. The West of Ireland is inhabited in parts, such as the county of Mayo, by the descendants of Cromwellian soldiers, who brought the Elizabethan English speech with them, and there it is to be heard to this day, hardly diminished in strength, from the lips of men and women who have forgotten the religion of their forefathers, but have not forgotten their language. The immense popularity of Shakespeare's plays in Ireland is largely due to the fact that the rich language in which they are written has a familiar sound in an Irishman's ears. The names written over the doors of the shopkeepers in Westport are not " Irish ", but English names : names like Austen and Bermingham ; and although the owners of those names are now Papists, the men from whom they were inherited were Protestants. Mr. Yeats told me once that a peasant in Galway, to whom he had spoken of Lady Gregory, said of her : " She's plain and simple, like the Mother of God, and that's the greatest lady that ever lived ". That language came to his tongue, not from the ancient Gaels, but from the Elizabethans, and it is Elizabethan English which makes the tongues of Irishmen

musical and rich. A gombeen-man in the West of Ireland, a sort of moneylender and pawnbroker, described the bog to me in these words, which need no addition : " It's brown and bare and wet ". Synge, who was a sick man and had the sick man's love of extravagance, could not leave this language as he found it, but must go polishing it, as the literary gents say, until such a speech as this, reported in " The Aran Islands " :

Bedad, noble person, I'm thinking it's soon you'll be getting married. Listen to what I'm telling you: a man who is not married is no better than an old jackass. He goes into his sister's house, and into his brother's house; he eats a bit in this place and a bit in another place, but he has no home for himself; like an old jackass straying on the rocks,

becomes, when spoken by Michael James Flaherty in " The Playboy of the Western World " :

It's the will of God, I'm thinking, that all should win an easy or a cruel end, and it's the will of God that all should rear up lengthy families for the nurture of the earth. What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, and he with no place of his own, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks.

Mr. Hardy, more sure in his reports of peasant speech than Synge, puts words into the mouths of his peasants which may not, perhaps, now be heard in English villages, though I have met men familiar with them who say, despite the discoloration of speech which has resulted from compulsory

education, that the words are still to be heard.¹ But the words which he makes his peasants say must once have been commonly heard in Wessex, for they *sound* true and are in the great tradition. When I read this lovely speech, spoken by Marty South at the end of "The Woodlanders", I recognise the language of a real person :

"Now, my own, own love," she whispered, "you are mine, and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died! But I—whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and heaven! . . . But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did great things!"

I find the decorated wreck of a great tradition in this speech, spoken by Christy Mahon, in "The Playboy of the Western World" :

If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl.

Even when Synge, in "Riders to the Sea", catches the Elizabethan note more surely, and uses a form not unlike that used by Marty South in Mr. Hardy's story, the voice is hardly the voice of the peasant

¹ Examples of fine peasant speech, contemporaneously spoken, may be found in a book by the late Lady Darwin. ("Six Plays," by Florence Henrietta Darwin. Cambridge: Heffer and Sons.)

woman, Maurya, so much as the voice of the middle-class invalid, Synge himself :

I'll have no call now to be up crying and praying, when the wind breaks from the south, and you can hear the surf is in the east, and the surf is in the west, making a great stir with the two noises, and they hitting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down and getting the holy water in the dark nights after Samhain, and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening. . . .

I do not doubt that Mr. Hardy selected the language of his peasants as carefully as Synge selected his, but there is a choice which is representative and there is a choice which is not. Language sobered Mr. Hardy : it intoxicated Synge. But, drunk or sober, would we who care for fine speech not infinitely prefer to hear such words as those than listen to the awfully jolly banalities of the "refaned" classes or the dull and limited language of the town labourer, whose chief contribution to conversation is a maddening repetition of one ugly and obscene adjective. The clipped and reticent sentences of a don poorly compare with the talk of Gabriel Oak. Which of us would willingly exchange Marty South's valediction for a King's Speech?

I have made that long digression to enforce my argument that the quality of Shakespeare de-

pended upon the quality of his contemporaries to a far greater extent than many people will acknowledge. All these things, in my belief, are inter-related : great language and great life ; and when we find speech falling into disrepair we must conclude that the people who use it are also falling into disrepair. Dean Inge, describing the heaven of Plotinus,¹ says " we become what we see, and we can only see what we are ready to become. We are what we care about and think upon and love ; and the movement is *ascendere per semetipsum supra semetipsum* ; for the self and its environment are glorified together."

On more than one occasion, this distinguished scholar who has enriched the religious life of his time, has asked the old question : " Did the sty make the pig or the pig make the sty ? " as if he himself believed that the pig was to blame for the foulness of the sty. He seems not to have considered the fact that the pig is imprisoned in the sty and is compelled to wallow in its own excreta because of its imprisonment. This is one of the cleanest of the animals—far cleaner than the cow, which makes itself filthy even in fields—but it has been given the reputation of the foulest, although no human being, shut in a cell and compelled to perform all the functions of the body

¹ " Personal Religion and the Life of Devotion." By W. R. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's.

there, could contrive to remain any cleaner. When Benvenuto Cellini was imprisoned in the Castle of St. Angelo by the Pope, although he struggled to maintain the decencies of civilised society, yet there came a time when he lost heart and was brought almost to the level of the beasts. The great Protestant period of Elizabeth was a time when the general level of prosperity was higher than it is now : there were fewer millionaires then than there are to-day, but there were also fewer paupers ; and the common Englishman, full of courage and eager for adventure, strengthened his spirit with the belief that he was a free man freely worshipping God. Out of that belief came the Elizabethan spirit, which made itself concentrated in the unquenchable beauty of Shakespeare.

It is odd that most of the modern European drama seems, in its deepest expressions, more akin to the drama of Greece than to that of Elizabethan England. The most conspicuous abstainer from pseudo-Greek belief is the great Protestant, Mr. Shaw. I have described the Greek drama as the tragedy of impotence and foredoomed men, and the Elizabethan drama as the tragedy of power and of men who have some decision over their destiny. The majority of the plays which have been performed in Europe in the past thirty or forty years have been tragedies of impotence when they have not been comedies of complaint. Man

has become the servant of machines, and great engines are of more account in this Age of Confusion than human beings. The heroic figure, protesting to heaven that he has some rights in his own soul, has disappeared from the stage, and in his place we are given a weak and spineless creature who asserts, when he is prepared to assert anything, that he is the victim of circumstances, and has no responsibility for his behaviour. Our most sensitive and humane dramatist, Mr. Galsworthy, continually exhibits man as a mean character who hardly struggles against his sentence of frustration. He offers us the figure of Falder, the crushed and cringing clerk in "Justice", not for our admiration, for we cannot admire him, but for our pity; and in giving the pity we cannot withhold our contempt. The Czecho-Slovakian dramatists, the brothers Capêk, portray the human race in "R.U.R." and "The Insect Play", not as the creatures of machines or men with a choice in their fate, but as machines themselves or impotent insects, without volition or authority. M. Charles Vildrac, a young Frenchman, in "S.S. Tenacity", tells us that man is a cork on a stream. Mr. Arthur Richman, an American author whose play "Ambush" was lately done in London, shows us a decent, unimpressive clerk being dragged into disreputable dependence upon a rich man who is keeping his drab of a daughter; and another

American, Mr. Elmer L. Rice, the author of "The Adding Machine", like the brothers Capék, describes man as an automatic machine, and even shows us a heaven which is drabber and drearier than Wormwood Scrubbs. Mr. Somerset Maugham, in "Our Betters", exhibits a set of empty, rich vulgarians whose appetites are uncontrolled by any decent desire. Wherever we look in Europe or America we find our dramatists asserting that man is not accountable for himself, that he is neither his brother's keeper nor his own. This new and more dismal tragedy of impotence revolts me as the Greek tragedy has never revolted me (for at least the Greeks went to the grave with some nobility, but these moderns meanly crawl into it) and I turn to the English tragedy of power for the comfort that a man must have if he is to survive at all.

We are not free people in the sense that our lives are entirely at our own disposal. We cannot control our birth, whether we shall be born or not, nor can we choose how we shall be born or of whom. How many of us would have chosen our parents had we had the power of choosing them? How many of our parents would have chosen us for their children if they had had the power to make a choice? In these matters of life we are without authority and the power of decision, but inside that slavery, if it be slavery,

we "still have judgment here". The choice is a limited one, but it is a choice. Our pseudo-Greeks deny that we have any choice at all. Their denial is a denial of life itself, and if we persist in making it, we must die. There is no freedom where there is no right to choose between one thing and another, and if mankind denies that it has the power to choose, then mankind must fall into servility in which there is no endurance, but only defilement and defeat and death. The purpose of the poet is to urge mankind to its high hope by reminding it of its high origin. Man came out of the imagination of Almighty God and can return to it. But if the poet will not remember his purpose, and insists that we are poor and impotent things, driven to a mean end by a cruel and unconscionable power, which has neither name nor shape, need we be astonished when we find that heroes no longer live for the increase and inspiration of the world! "It is not possible," says Longinus, "that men with mean and servile ideas and aims prevailing throughout their lives should produce anything that is admirable or worthy of immortality." In that great period when the world was rousing itself to the glory of the Renaissance, men walked and talked like gods. Shakespeare was the contemporary of Cervantes—they died within ten days of each other. Milton was a boy of seven when Shakespeare was

laid in Stratford Church: he was barely thirteen years of age when Molière was born in France. Greatness flourished in the people, and because it flourished in them, great men were plentiful in England, France and Spain.

And now our question is, can we recover that spirit, or have we become too much the creatures of machines? Can we leave to our descendants three hundred years from now a heritage as rich in every respect as that which we received from our Elizabethan fathers? It is not yet, I think, too late. There still is time to recapture the heroic mood and "feel immortal longings" and raise again the breed of heroes.

His legs bestrid the ocean; his rear'd arm
Crested the world: his voice was property'd
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in 't; an autumn 'twas
That grew the more by reaping: his delights
Were dolphin-like; they show'd his back above
The element they liv'd in; in his livery
Walk'd crowns and crownets; realms and islands
were
As plates dropp'd from his pocket. . . .
Think you there was or might be such a man
As this I dream'd of?

I think there might be, but not until we have made ourselves fit for his company.

IV.

i

I BEGIN, then, with the belief that a fine audience is an essential factor in the production of a fine drama. It may seem to some of my readers that I am ranging very far from my theme, and that I am offering them a discourse on sociology instead of a discourse on drama. But the point of this book is that the quality of the drama depends enormously upon sociological facts. I am not a political economist, and am incapable of arguing intelligently on such matters as the laws of supply and demand. Six separate persons have laboriously tried to explain to me the processes by which currency is inflated or deflated, but I remain as ignorant of them as I am of the forces which govern the rates of exchange. It may be, therefore, as some assert, that I am arguing from the wrong point of view, and that fine plays will create fine audiences ; but some obstinacy in me makes me continue to believe that the assertion would be nearer to the truth if it were reversed.

I believe that fine audiences cause the creation of fine plays, and I find support for my faith in the fact that a good play is never lost to the world. Sooner or later it finds its audience. If such plays are being written in our time, but are not being produced on our stage, the conclusion surely to which we must come is that if they eventually are performed before appreciative audiences, these appreciative audiences will be superior to our audiences?

When the matter contained in this book was delivered in the form of lectures at Liverpool University, a sentence of two in what is now the second chapter perturbed some of my auditors who supposed me to be deriding education and even to be advocating slavery. I said that the majority of the Elizabethans were illiterate, and that the majority of the Athenians were both illiterate and slaves, and yet these two peoples produced the greatest drama in the world. My meaning was, I thought, clear, that education is an instrument, not a purpose in itself, and that it will be well or ill-used according to the quality of those who possess it. The same is true of freedom. A first-class education is wasted on a third-class people, and freedom when given to a mean-minded, greedy race becomes a most powerful instrument for tyranny. We have still to learn, most of us, that law is the condition of

liberty, and that there is no freedom but the voluntary submission of self-respecting men and women to authority. The rule of the road was not invented for the confusion of traffic, but so that there might be traffic. It does not reduce the swift-moving vehicle to the speed of the slow-moving one: it enables them both to get along. If there were no rule of the road, and each vehicle were allowed to go just as its driver pleased, the streets would be impassable. We discover in the accumulated experience of mankind certain broad laws which remain fairly true for all generations; and progress, if there be any progress at all, is made when these laws are most widely recognised. My purpose here is to show how one of these laws works in the theatre.

ii

The law is that all art, but especially the art of drama, depends, not upon the quality of the small body of persons in any nation who practise the art, but upon the mental and physical and spiritual condition of the whole race. The machinery of the mind, which is education in the narrow sense of knowing how to read and write and do sums in arithmetic, becomes positively harmful when controlled by a sick or feeble mind. It is possible for a nation to be inhabited by a

majority of illiterates and yet be superior to a nation which is inhabited by a majority of literates. When persons of poor physique are given instruction, one of two things is likely to happen to them : if they are clever they are likely to become cunning or to have their imagination made febrile ; if they are of average ability, they are likely to have their imagination made dull. When persons of fine physique are left uninstructed, they are likely to become coarse in their opinions and conduct and to bring ruin upon themselves and their country. Gibbon, in " The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire ", shows how easily a race can be ruined when the majority of its people are strong, but uninstructed. The Prætorian Guard fell to such a depth of greed and spiritual emptiness that it actually put the Roman Empire up to auction and knocked it down to the highest bidder! The Roman Empire, indeed, furnishes me with many illustrations for my argument, and I propose to make extensive quotations from Gibbon in support of it.

But before I do so, I shall make an assertion about drama which seems to me to be indisputable. It is this. When a nation is strongest, physically and spiritually, its people delight most in tragedy. When a nation is weakest, physically, and spiritually, its people will not listen to tragedy, but demand what is called light entertainment :

comic plays, spectacular pieces, trivial shows. Of the four great Greek dramatists who have survived to us, three—Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, were tragedians, and one, Aristophanes, was a comedian. The Elizabethans preferred to write tragedies rather than comedies, and seemingly they had no trouble in getting audiences for them. Shakespeare wrote every kind of play, from farce to tragedy, but is remembered by us more for his tragedies than for his comedies. We think of him as the author of "Hamlet" and "King Lear" and "Romeo and Juliet" and "Othello", rather than as the author of "The Comedy of Errors" and "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night". As he grew in experience and prosperity, he became more and more the author of tragic plays. And what is true of him is largely true of his contemporaries. Here, surely, is a paradox? When Greece was greatest, the tragic dramatists were predominant. In the great age of England, when there was less individual poverty than there is now, when the people were happy and adventurous and fortunate and full of courage, the dramatists were predominantly engaged in writing tragedies. How are we to account for this singular fact?

I do not ask the reader to believe that the Athenians and the Elizabethans cared only for tragedy. There was bear-baiting in Shakespeare's

time and a fondness for rough clowning which he heartily disliked, and no doubt many very silly and shallow entertainments were patronised by the Greeks. But the predominant drama was a tragic drama, and the predominant drama of any great and happy race is *always* a tragic drama. How else can we account for the fact that the comic contributions to English dramatic literature have been made by Irishmen: Goldsmith, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw and Synge; and that the founder of the English comedy of manners, Congreve, although he was born in England, was taken early in his childhood to Ireland, where he grew up and, presumably, was infected by the national spirit? The Romans in the days of their decadence would not look at tragedy. Gibbon, in a footnote, tells us that "in the time of Quintillian and Pliny, a tragic poet was reduced to the imperfect method of hiring a room, and reading his play to the company whom he had invited for that purpose". To-day, in England, it is almost impossible to secure production for a tragic piece. When Flecker's "Hassan" was finally performed in London (ten years after its author had written it) the tragic scenes were "cut" and the spectacular scenes were extended. "Hamlet" is not now performed in the West End of London at all, but if it were, it would hardly secure a hundred consecutive performances. But "Chu

Chin Chow " broke all the world's records for a continuous run, and even at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester, in Miss Horniman's time, the records were broken by a singularly trashy piece, called " The Knave of Diamonds ", made out of an even trashier novel of the same name. That theatre is now, after years of high adventure and courageous management, a picture palace!

I do not wish to make too much of the fact that " Hamlet " is unlikely to be performed for more than a hundred consecutive performances, whereas a trashy pantomime is likely to be performed for a year and may be performed for five years, because the performance of a tragedy makes a greater demand upon the mind of the audience than is made by a comic piece. One may yield that point to those who defend the mobs which crowd to the performance of trash and fail to go at all to plays of merit, but one can hardly deny that when a nation's theatres are mainly, and even exclusively, occupied by trivial and comic and spectacular pieces, that nation is either in deep distress or its mind is bankrupt.

There is something demented about a man who is continually giggling. It is not natural to healthy, normal-minded people always to be roaring with laughter. The curious may discover for themselves by reading the biographies of actors and actresses that comedians die sooner than

tragedians, and that many of them go out of their minds. The man of tragic temper keeps his wits intact to the end, and generally dies with serenity in old age. I am now seriously suggesting to the reader that a passion for comic entertainments is a sign of ill-health in a nation, and that just as a man who is always giggling and tittering and roaring with laughter is probably mad, so a nation which is always giggling and tittering and roaring with laughter is probably on the way to the madhouse. Attend to Gibbon on the decadence of the Roman Empire. He is describing the measures made for the relief of distress. These included the free distribution of bread and bacon and oil. Wine and public baths were sold at trifling cost. The baths were very luxurious buildings, made of Egyptian granite, beautifully incrusting with the precious green marble of Numidia. A "perpetual stream of hot water was poured into the capacious basins, through so many wide mouths of bright and massy silver":

From these stately palaces issued a stream of dirty and ragged plebeians without shoes, and without a mantle; who loitered away whole days in the street of Forum, to hear news and to hold disputes; who dissipated in extravagant gaming, the miserable pittance of their wives and children; and spent the hours of the night in obscure taverns and brothels in the indulgence of gross and vulgar sensuality. But the most lively and splendid amusement of the idle multitude depended on the frequent exhibition of public games and spectacles. The piety of Christian princes had

suppressed the inhuman combats of gladiators; but the Roman people still considered the circus as their home, their temple and the seat of the republic. The impatient crowd rushed at the dawn of day to secure their places, and there were many who passed a sleepless and anxious night in the adjacent porticoes . . .

just like a crowd waiting for the beginning of a Cup-tie or a sensational trial for murder at the Old Bailey.

From the morning to the evening, careless of the sun or the rain, the spectators, who sometimes amounted to the number of four hundred thousand, remained in eager attention; their eyes fixed on the horses and charioteers, their minds agitated with hope and fear for the success of the colours which they espoused; and the happiness of Rome appeared to hang on the event of a race. . . . But the Tragic and Comic Muse of the Romans, who seldom aspired beyond the imitation of the Attic genius, had been almost totally silent since the fall of the republic; and their place was unworthily filled by licentious farce, effeminate music and splendid pageantry. The pantomimes, who maintained their reputation from the age of Augustus to the sixth century, expressed, without the use of words . . .

almost like moving pictures

. . . the various fables of the gods and heroes of antiquity; and the perfection of their art, which sometimes disarmed the gravity of the philosopher, always excited the applause and wonder of the people. The vast and magnificent theatres of Rome were filled by three thousand female dancers, and by three thousand singers, with the masters of their respective choruses. Such was the popular favour which they enjoyed that, in a time of scarcity, when all strangers were banished from the city, the merit of contributing to the public pleasures exempted *them* from a law which was strictly executed against the professors of the liberal arts. . . .

In the age of decadence, you will observe, buffoonery is preferred to learning, and a clown can secure bread when it is denied to a scholar. The rich disdain "the modest, the sober and the learned" and seek for their companions among "the most worthless of mankind" who "practise the most useful of all arts, the art of flattery; who eagerly applaud each word and every action of their immortal patron; gaze with rapture on his marble columns and variegated pavements; and strenuously praise the pomp and elegance which he is taught to consider as a part of his personal merit". In such a society as that, nobles will be found exciting themselves over mere oddities and by gambling. "The acquisition of knowledge," says Gibbon, "seldom engages the curiosity of the nobles, who abhor the fatigue and disdain the advantages of study; and the only books which they peruse are the satires of Juvenal and the verbose and fabulous histories of Marius Maximus. The libraries which they have inherited from their fathers are secluded like dreary sepulchres from the light of day. But the costly instruments of the theatre, flutes and enormous lyres and hydraulic organs, are constructed for their use; and the harmony of vocal and instrumental music is incessantly repeated in the palaces of Rome. In those palaces sound is preferred to sense; and the care of the body to

that of the mind." And here follows a passage which is peculiarly applicable to our own post-war period :

These vices, which degrade the moral character of the Romans, are mixed with a puerile superstition that disgraces their understanding. They listen with confidence to the predictions of haruspices who pretend to read in the entrails of victims the signs of future greatness and prosperity ; and there are many who do not presume to bathe or to dine or to appear in public till they have diligently consulted, according to the rules of astrology, the situation of Mercury and the aspect of the moon. It is singular enough that this vain credulity may often be discovered among the profane sceptics who impiously doubt or deny the existence of a celestial deity.

I direct attention specially to that passage because of the fact that in the last ten years there has grown up in this country an immense interest in what Gibbon calls " puerile superstition ". And at this point, I would like to make a further quotation from Gibbon, a brief one of peculiar interest to us. At the beginning of the fifth chapter of the first volume of the " Decline and Fall ", he says :

It has been calculated by the ablest politicians that no state, without soon being exhausted, can maintain above the hundredth part of its members in arms and idleness.

I am not an economist, and therefore am unable to pronounce any opinion on that statement, but if it be true, then we are on the verge of ruin, for

we maintain considerably more than a hundredth part of our population in idleness alone, apart altogether from those whom we maintain in arms. It is clear that the signs of decadence in a race are an indifferent and trivial-minded aristocracy, an idle and subsidised proletariat, a passion for gambling and for luxurious display, a contempt for learning, a love of spectacular entertainments and a hatred of tragic drama. Marlowe, at the end of the first sestiad of "Hero and Leander" notes that "Midas' brood" sits in "Honour's chair":

And fruitful wits, that inaspiring are,
Shall discontent run into regions far;
And few great lords in virtuous deeds shall joy
But be surpris'd with every garish toy,
And still enrich the lofty servile clown,
Who with encroaching guile keeps learning down,

while a distinguished dramatic critic of our own age, Mr. A. B. Walkley of "The Times", in a book of his, entitled "More Prejudice", which was lately published, makes this scornful reference to the contemporary theatre:

The majority of playgoers, however, make no pretensions to intellect; they don't want it, and they don't get it. They get a vapid, semi-romantic picture of the life they themselves live, or would like to live. There is scarcely a breath of poetry, of spirituality, in the modern theatre. There is no dignity, ethical or artistic. What does abound in it is mediocrity—mediocrity of mind, of ideal, of taste. Why, then, be so solemn about it?

The answer to Mr. Walkley's despairing question is, that if we are not solemn about it, it will perish, and that its perishing will be a sign that we, too, are perishing ; for a great people cannot do otherwise than produce a great drama. If we are found capable only of enjoying " licentious farce, effeminate music and splendid pageantry ", shall we not end as Rome ended? One observes that this corrosion of the spirit has spread to such an extent that when a genuinely religious play, closely akin to a medieval morality, like " Androcles and the Lion " is produced in Liverpool, few people go to see it, and those who do, openly pronounce it to be a mockery of religion. Can ineptitude go farther or fare worse? I do not wish to push the analogy between our situation and that of Rome during the decline too closely, because I am unwilling to believe that our country is doomed to disappear from the ranks of great nations ; but I suggest to you that there is a sufficient resemblance between our state and that of the Romans to fill us with uneasiness. It is very little comfort to say that the rest of Europe is in the same state. Here we are at the end of fifty-four years of compulsory education and nineteen centuries of Christian civilisation, in a vastly inferior physical and spiritual condition to that either of our ancestors three hundred years ago or of the Greeks in their great days. Attica was less than half

the size of Lancashire. Sparta had 39,000 inhabitants, and Athens had only 21,000. The population of the whole of England in the time of Queen Elizabeth was little more than half what the total population of London is to-day, and the mass of the people could neither read nor write. Yet out of these two small nations came the greatest drama in the history of the world. And that drama was predominantly a tragic one.

iii

How are we to explain this paradox of a happy and fortunate people taking their pleasure in tragedy? It is, I think, because none but happy and strong and fortunate people can face the thought of death and disaster without flinching. A nation, any more than a man, which is neurotic or weak from loss of blood, cannot face the fact of death with the fortitude with which it is faced by a nation or a man possessed of strength and healthy nerves. Consider the circumstances in which we have lived during the past ten years—a period of great nervous strain and physical exhaustion—and ask yourself whether it is unnatural that we should have the sick man's craving for trivial entertainments, or the nerve-racked or ill-nourished man's demand for violent excitement. It is not possible for a nation to lose eight hundred

thousand of its finest men in four years and remain as fine as it was before they died. This impoverishment of our race came at a critical time in our history and in the history of Europe. The great concentration of masses of people in small areas had been nearly completed when the War broke out, and the tone of Europe was rapidly changing from the slow, deliberate temper of a people mainly engaged in agriculture to the quick, preternaturally clever and hysterical temper of a people mainly engaged in industry. The agriculturalists liked long plays, full of long speeches and concerned with such primal things as love and death and the mysterious conflict between man and his environment ; but the industrialists like short plays, full of abrupt, snappy sentences, and concerned only with exciting temporary and emotional things : mechanical mysteries and pretty-pretty spectacles. The very word "mystery" had a vastly different significance for the agriculturalists from that which it has for the industrialists. A mystery, in the old meaning, was concerned with religion, but a mystery in our meaning is concerned chiefly with a crime which is not immediately explicable. When a medieval man spoke of a mystery, he was thinking of God, but when we speak of a mystery we are thinking of the contents of "The News of the World".

It was natural that tragic poetry should be com-

monly composed in the agricultural period of our history, because men who live in villages and earn their bread from the soil or the sea are made aware of the essential facts of life in a way that is not possible to men who live in cities. It was not for nothing that such men as Shakespeare and Mr. Thomas Hardy were born in small communities, for life unfolds itself more fully in a village or a small town than it does in a great city, where, indeed, it is seen only in broken fragments. In London, one hears of the birth of a child or the death of an old man, and there knowledge ends. But in a village one sees a generation coming into the world and growing up and replacing its predecessors and declining into old age and being replaced. There is a completeness of existence in a village which is not to be found in a city. And these people of the village, knowing the regularity of Nature, how she comes and goes by law, and the patience with which she performs her ordained ritual, bring into their lives and their artistic expression the deep and indescribable knowledge which comes to them through their own experience and the experience which they have inherited from their fathers. They are more aware of the continuity of life, even when they cannot speak of it, than those who live in cities, because there is less experience to be gained in a city than in a village. It has been said, but I

cannot say with what truth, that hardly any persons are to be found in London who are the third generation of a family which has lived there. In the old times, in Greece, a metropolis was a place which nourished the provinces with men of intellect, but now a metropolis is a place which robs the provinces of men of intellect. And these thefts are repeated generation after generation because London and New York and their like can do nothing with a man of intellect but devour him. Just as a lion becomes sterile in captivity, so men become sterile in cities; and the provinces are drained dry so that London and New York may continue to flourish.

Does it not seem inevitable that poetry must perish in towns or that it must become an overwrought and neurotic thing? The fact becomes clear and unmistakable when we survey the history of European drama from the beginning of the industrial era. By the time of Goldsmith and Sheridan we had arrived at the beginning of the great revolution in European society which began in England. Goldsmith, indeed, was almost the first to perceive the change, and he wrote "The Deserted Village" to warn his countrymen of what was happening. Few things are so pathetic as the modesty with which Goldsmith, that far-sighted man, dedicated his poem to Sir Joshua Reynolds, warning him and all Englishmen that they were

starting on a road which might lead them to irretrievable ruin. He was laughed at for his pains. Garrick and Boswell called him a ninny, and even Dr. Johnson, who loved him, thought him a fool. How could it be otherwise in that time of artifice when a man could be found to say that the finest prospect in the world was the view down Fleet Street, that one field was very like another field, and that water in one part of the world was like water in another part; and men of education rarely went into the country unless they were obliged to. Yet we who lived through the War of 1914-1918 nearly died of starvation because our forefathers a hundred and seventy years ago thought that Oliver Goldsmith was an ass.

iv

Early in the eighteenth century, authors who, prior to that time, had mainly expressed themselves in poems and plays, began to express themselves in newspapers and novels. Novels had been published, chiefly in Spain and Italy, for several centuries before this. The greatest of them all, Cervantes' "Don Quixote", was being composed while Shakespeare was putting "Hamlet" on the stage, and the first part of it was printed in the same year in which "Othello" was performed for the first time. But in any wide and

general sense, the novel, particularly among English-speaking people, did not begin to be published until long after the play had been established in popularity. The printing press was still in a crude condition, and more importantly, the mass of the people were illiterate. Plays, therefore, which are meant to be *heard*, whereas novels are meant to be *read*, were more likely to be profitable to authors than any other sort of writing, since the number of persons who could not read was considerably greater than the number who could. The collection of books was the concern of a small, highly cultured class who resented any attempts to increase their number ; and the whole business of publication, because of the feeble laws of copyright, was so mixed up with rascality that authors were inclined to regard publishers as villains to be suppressed, rather than as colleagues to be encouraged. Shakespeare, who troubled himself very little about posthumous fame, scarcely bothered to print his work. Most of his plays were published after his death, and might have been lost to us for ever if it had not been for the devotion of his friends, Heminges and Condell. Ben Jonson was considered by his contemporaries to be a preposterous egotist because he was at pains to get his plays printed, but we could wish that Shakespeare had been afflicted with some of his conceit.

As the printing press was improved, so the illiteracy of mankind decreased; and in the eighteenth century there were a sufficient number of educated persons in the world to make the publication of books profitable. Man wanted opinions, as well as news, and so the modern newspaper was founded. Man has always wished to hear stories, and now he (and particularly she) wished to read them, so the novel began to appear in the booksellers' shops. A bookseller, indeed, Samuel Richardson, was the most popular novelist, "the best-seller", of his time. The immediate effect of the founding of newspapers and the rise of the novel was immense injury to the play. It was easier to stay in a comfortable home and read a novel than go through cheerless streets, possibly damp, certainly dark, to a stuffy and congested theatre to see a play which might or might not be worth all the trouble taken to see it; and so it came about that the theatre, in England, became the place to which only those people went who were unhappy or uncomfortable at home. Between the time of Sheridan and Goldsmith and the time of Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, the drama in England and throughout Europe steadily dropped into disfavour and disrepute. Everywhere in the civilised world, great writers were expressing themselves chiefly in novels. In the first third of the nineteenth

century, the English theatre ceased to have any excuse for existing, and, barring the period when the small talent of Tom Robertson was displayed, it continued to be without any excuse for existing until the last third of that century. In France, the theatre was intellectually and spiritually bankrupt, in which condition it continues, but it was kept in some seemliness of shape through the mechanical skill of the dramatists, one of whom, Scribe, actually founded a factory, in which he employed a number of "hands" or collaborators, for the manufacture of plays. Scribe assembled a play much in the way that Henry Ford assembles a motor-car. What saved the theatre in both these countries from extinction was the high quality of the acting, a fact which has misled many persons into the belief that great acting only flourishes on bad plays.

This state of affairs could not last for ever. Either the theatre must perish or recover some of its lost glory. Great institutions do not die easily, and the theatre had been great. Just as it was on the point of expiring, a poet who had turned sociologist, Henrik Ibsen, came and restored its mind to activity. Indeed, he overworked its mind. He forgot that the creature had been half-starved for nearly a century, and he set himself to improving its mind before he had improved its body. It is doubtful whether he ever thought of its body

at all. He filled its head with arguments and taught it to ask questions and to discuss policies and points of view, but he did not fill its stomach with nourishing meat. The result was that the theatre, except in France, was thrown into a fever of the mind, and became slightly neurotic. In France, it remained in a fever of the body, and became nauseous.

Ibsen himself never had any great popular success in the theatre, but his influence on the minds of other dramatists was enormous, particularly in Germany, where his system of stimulating the mind in a starved body, ended in the demented drama of Frank Wedekind and the medico-salacity of Arthur Schnitzler. The whole moral and social system of England, where religion was being conducted strictly on business principles, was beginning to look shaky ; and Pinero and Jones, after a prosperous passage through the ordinary channels of theatrical traffic—farces and sentimental comedy—followed the fashion set by Ibsen, and began to ask questions, too. Industrialism, which had had a long start in England, had now established itself in America and in the rest of Europe, with precisely the same results, and the conscience of two continents was deeply perturbed. All this mechanical progress was not making mankind any happier or, the generality of it, even better off. It was arguable that mankind

was in many respects worse off. What was to be done about it? Pinero argued chiefly about marriage and the social customs of the upper classes. Jones also argued about marriage, but confined his criticism mainly to the customs of the middle classes, expressing himself very angrily about the narrow-mindedness of the Nonconformists. Then Oscar Wilde, who never argued, but always asserted, tried to prove that the world was pleasantly inhabited by epigrammatic duchesses, with a polite taste for theoretic adultery, a world in which there was no poverty, and even the footmen had charming manners ; but he mixed his paradoxes and his morality so inextricably that he was put in prison and eventually died in Paris of a dismal disease. His attempt to restore the polish of Congreve and Sheridan to an exhausted society by plastering commonplace melodramas with irrelevant epigrams could hardly have succeeded in any circumstances, but in such circumstances as his it was certain to fail.

v

The uneasiness of England and of Europe and, by reflection, of America, continued. Questions were raised in greater numbers about more fundamental matters, and raised with the greater persistency because answers were seldom returned

to them. The big voice of Ibsen boomed all over Europe, provoking jeers and denials from Strindberg in Sweden, and his questions were repeated less resonantly, but more didactically, by Hauptmann and Sudermann and a hundred others in Germany. Jacinto Benavente made brilliant pictures of Spanish society which hurt conventional feelings more than if he had made plain, blunt assertions about it. In France, Brieux boldly kicked drama off the stage and put sociology in its place. Ibsen had been vague in his references to sexual disease in "Ghosts", but Brieux was determined that there should not be any doubt about his meaning in "Damaged Goods": he insisted that the manager of the theatre should inform the audience, before the performance began, "that the object of this play is a study of the disease of syphilis in its bearing on marriage." This plainness of speech and intention caused Mr. Bernard Shaw to proclaim Brieux as "the most important dramatist west of Russia" who had "confronted Europe" since "the death of Ibsen" and "incomparably the greatest writer France has produced since Molière"—an astonishing statement! In England, Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy and Harley-Granville-Barker and many others, engaged in the argument. Mr. Shaw made a platform of the stage, and did the job so brilliantly that many persons were convinced that

a stage ought to be a platform. Mr. Galsworthy cast doubts upon the Law and was impatient with the strong. Mr. Granville-Barker derided the moral standard of the Later Victorians who seemed to believe that a man who became a co-respondent in a divorce suit was capable of any infamy, and must therefore be debarred from all share in the government of his country. Plays were written about sweated labour, about industrial strife, about religious dissensions, about the treatment of lunatics, about the reform of the divorce laws, about the enfranchisement of women, about the upbringing and education of children, about the tyranny of the family and the disproportion between a father's authority over his wife and children and his ability to exercise it. The earlier English sociological dramatists, Pinero and Jones, had been content to criticise the behaviour of a single class, but their successors, Shaw and Galsworthy and Granville-Barker, criticised the whole of society: its organisation and social arrangements, its morals and its religion. In Russia, Anton Chekhov was prophesying the downfall of his country in plays like "The Cherry Orchard", which were startlingly exact in their forecasts. In Belgium, Verhaeren, in Italy, Pirandello—wherever one went to the theatre in Europe one heard much argument and uneasy discussion.

Not all, or, indeed, the majority, of the

dramatists were of this critical character. Some were content to tell stories ; more were content to exploit the general love of comfort or to pander to the senses ; but a few, dismayed perhaps by the disaster they foresaw, attempted to withdraw from any responsibility for it. They washed their hands of their generation. If Italy had Pirandello, the greatest of contemporary Italian dramatists, it also had D'Annunzio, the most flamboyant of all dramatists, alive or dead, in whom delicacy and refinement of manner became positively disgusting. Belgium, the most practical of the nations, produced a thin-minded dramatist in Maeterlinck, who tried to make plays out of wisps of exhausted emotion, and did it so well that some uncritical enthusiasts immediately hailed him as " the Belgian Shakespeare ", although anyone less like Shakespeare could hardly be imagined. France set Rostand in the same age as Brieux ; Barrie and Shaw were contemporaries in England. Ireland, beginning a renaissance of her own, which speedily perished from lack of staying power, found an exhausted Elizabethan in John Millington Synge, who flavoured fine prose with the scent of bitter aloes. These were the reactionaries, but they were without virility, and they soon died. The dominant note in European drama was that sounded by Ibsen : the note of uneasiness. The times were out of joint, but no one appeared to set them

right, although many appeared to say how wrong they were.

In August 1914 the disaster fell, and the drama immediately descended to the gutter. It became plain that in the War for culture, culture was the first casualty, and it remains plain that the first casualty of the War was the most grievously wounded, for it has not yet recovered its health. In France, the theatre was closed for the greater part of the War, but, when we remember the quality of most of the French plays, this was no great loss. In England, spectacular pieces and "revues" of an unusually imbecile character were the principal productions. The demand for amusement was so great and so indiscriminating that get-rich-quick persons were drawn to theatrical management by the prospect of making easy fortunes very rapidly. Much money was made, but more was lost, for the public taste, having first been debased, became sickened, and after a period of intensive gambling, during which the rents of theatres, the salaries of actors and the general costs of production enormously increased, a slump ensued and many bankruptcies occurred. The end of that phase, though near, has not yet come.

And there we are. I return to my assertion that tragic drama is the sign of a great race and that we to-day are a sick race, and I ask you to

imagine that Shakespeare is alive now. You are to think of him setting out from Stratford with the MS. of "Hamlet" in his pocket, and you are to ask yourselves how much hope he would have of getting it performed. He would find all the London theatres governed by commercial syndicates with hardly any knowledge of plays, or indeed, of anything but the necessity of making large fortunes, swiftly and easily.¹ If he were to discover a manager of taste, he would find him hampered by lack of money and the high costs of production. "Hamlet" contains more than thirty speaking parts, and requires the employment of a large body of supernumerary actors and actresses, as well as many stage-hands to shift the scenery. It is the sort of play which a modern manager would refuse to produce on the ground

¹ A notable disability shared by all the gambling syndicates and profiteering men of commerce who have got control of the theatre since 1914 is a complete incapacity for visualising a play from manuscript. This means that they are obliged to revive plays which were successful when first produced or to produce plays which have been successfully performed in other countries, principally in America or France. The modern theatre manager is an extensive traveller because he has no imagination. He is also a sheep. If one manager is doing well with a Barrie play, then all the managers must produce or revive Barrie plays, until the public becomes satiated with Barrie. Mr. Chaplin, in an article published in "The Adelphi" for January 1924, notes a similar sheepishness in the manufacturers of moving-pictures. He says, "When Griffith produced 'The Birth of a Nation' in many reels the rival producers who knew to a certainty what the public wanted, shook their heads. The effort was beforehand consigned to failure. The two-reel picture was the natural length. But when 'The Birth of a Nation' turned out to be a tremendous success the future of spectacular films was certain, and many others followed quickly."

of expense, apart altogether from the damning fact that it is a tragedy. At the end of the play, the hero and the heroine are dead. She has been drowned in circumstances which cause the ecclesiastical authorities to suspect that she committed suicide. The hero's mother is dead of poison which was intended for the hero by his stepfather, who is also dead. The hero's own father was murdered before the play began, but his ghost prowls around demanding revenge. The heroine's father is dead, having been accidentally murdered by the hero. The heroine's brother is dead, having been killed in a duel by the hero. The heroine's mother does not appear in the play or she would, no doubt, have been killed too ! . . .

If Shakespeare were a young man alive to-day and were to take the MS. of that play to a West End manager, he would probably be thrown out of the theatre. At best, he would be urged to go away and write a cheerful piece on the ground that people will not now look at tragedy because their own lives are so grey and depressing that they must be taken out of themselves. Taken out of themselves ! What a singular commentary on our boasted progress. The upshot of all our civilisation and progress is that the lives of the overwhelming mass of mankind are so grey and depressing that they must be artificially brightened in the theatre. There were no motor-cars, no

aeroplanes, no luxurious steamships, no wireless telegraphy, no long-range guns in the days of Queen Elizabeth and her uneducated subjects, but the lives of her people were not passed in such circumstances of depression that they had to be doped with spurious romance in the theatre. They had the health and strength and manliness to be able to listen to a tragedy without being reduced to a state of nervous prostration. They could look upon death and not be afraid of it.

It is almost unnecessary, says Gibbon, to remark that the civil distractions of the empire, the licence of the soldiers, the inroads of the barbarians, and the progress of despotism has proved very unfavourable to genius, and even to learning. The succession of Illyrian princes restored the empire, without restoring the sciences. Their military education was not calculated to inspire them with the love of letters ; and even the mind of Diocletian, however active and capacious in business, was totally uninformed by study or speculation. The professions of law and physic are of such common use and certain profit that they will always secure a sufficient number of practitioners endowed with a reasonable degree of abilities and knowledge ; but it does not appear that the students in those two faculties appeal to any celebrated masters who have flourished within that period. The voice of poetry was silent. History was reduced to dry and confused abridgments, alike destitute of amusement and instruction. A languid and affected eloquence was still retained in the pay and service of the emperors who encouraged not any arts except those which contributed to the gratification of their pride or the defence of their power.

The Romans wasted themselves in luxury and war. They had almost achieved a League of Nations, but it fell to pieces because they exalted

the soldier above the senator and preferred ease to effort. And what was true of the Romans is true of us. We Europeans have wasted our substance in war and seem ready to complete our ruin by more war. "They tell me we have no literature," said Napoleon. "I must speak to the Minister of the Interior about it." But what could the Minister of the Interior do for him when the Minister of War was doing so much?

We are an exhausted people, sick from a great effusion of blood, and we will not create a great drama or a great anything else until we have recovered our health. But of what use will it be to recover our health if, when we have done so, we immediately destroy it again? Nations are greatest, not when they are most fierce and bloody-minded, but when they have acquired a quiet mind and have leisure in which to think and to create. What does all this progress that we have made in the past two centuries amount to? Cheap newspapers which are an insult to the mind; a population which is physically exhausted and spiritually empty; a poverty of imagination which leaves us at the mercy of any ruffian who chooses to exploit us for his profit; an outpouring of nasty and neurotic novels written by hysterical women and overwrought men; and in our theatre a succession of vulgar and tawdry spectacles in which there is neither wit nor form nor beauty. Crowds

of men and women will stand in queues and sit up all night to get a seat at the trial of a sensational murderer ; and our newspapers will utilise their vast and expensive organisation to increase the interest in such trials. When gambling becomes a craving almost dangerous to the community, the vulgar newspapers strive with each other to encourage it, and fill up the intervals between race meetings by holding sweepstakes. The inevitable demoralisation which follows after all wars has found us so demoralised that those who might fairly be held accountable for restoring us to a sense of decency are discovered to be the very persons who are promoting and profiting by the demoralisation. When a youth, who formed part of the queue outside the Old Bailey during a sensational trial, was asked why he wished to be present at it, he replied : " Well, it's life, ain't it ? " That is the state to which all this progress and machinery and great cities and compulsory education and war and cheap newspapers have brought us. What are we to do with a population which has lost its nerve and believes that a sordid crime is life, and gets its spiritual and mental nourishment in the Courts of Law ?

That is our problem. The quality of our race, and probably of all the races of Europe, has temporarily dropped. We took our best and destroyed it in four murderous years, and there

is left on our hands a mass of old and disheartened men, of thwarted and embittered women, of youths and girls reared in cynicism and neurosis, and a remnant of faithful people ; and with that remnant of faithful people we have to rebuild our civilisation. It is a hard and heartbreaking job, but it can be done. Nature is incessant in her attempts to repair broken things. Hardly had the guns ceased to smash the soil of France than Nature set herself to restore it. The walls of the trenches fell in and the shell-holes began to fill and grass grew over them. The peasant, that enduring, unthwartable man, ignored the politician and took his plough and smoothed out the disrupted fields. In a little while, the devastated area will be bearing corn, and there will be no sign in the fields of France that men suffered and died there through four years of the foulest war. Life is terribly tenacious, and will not easily be destroyed. Once in Devonshire, during the War, I saw a wood cut down for pit props. When all the trees were taken away, the hill on which they had grown was left naked and so ugly that it seemed as if it could never be beautiful again. Then the Spring came, and suddenly that hill, where few had grown before, was covered by masses of foxgloves. Almost it seemed that the seeds from which they sprang had been hiding in the soil all the time the trees were there, waiting

for a chance to grow, and that when the chance came they rose up and took it. And in our schools or newly out of them is a great multitude of boys and girls who are preparing to take our place. They are very attractive, saner than the generation that grew up during the War, with none of its neurosis and triviality and cynicism. Nature has resolved to replace the life which was wasted in the War with a life as fine and perhaps finer. And who knows, there may be a young Shakespeare coming up to one of the universities with the seeds of immortality in his head. What are we going to do for him? What sort of a theatre have we prepared for him?

V

i

WE have now reached the point in our discussion of the theatre when we can stop to survey the ruins. What is left to us? How may we clear away the debris and rebuild the theatre? In the last chapter we gazed with dismay on the figure of a young Shakespeare, carrying the manuscript of a "Hamlet" to a West End theatre, and now we must try to devise some better reception for him than he is likely at present to receive. My hope is that those who have read this far, realise that our ruined theatre was reduced to ruin by a variety of things, of which the chief were the decline in the spiritual and physical quality of the race, the difficulty of finance, and the mental and social disturbance caused by the War. I have spent much space in discussing the first of these three factors, and I shall not spend any more, except, in discussing the third, to draw attention to one disturbing characteristic of our time, namely, that all our standards as a result

of the War have definitely been lowered. The educational standards have been lowered in nearly all schools, from the elementary school to the university ; and if certain ruffianly newspaper proprietors, whose personal lives are rotten in every respect, are permitted to have their way, those standards will not be raised again. There is a sort of rich rascal who has a vested interest in the maintenance of an uninstructed and vulgar population, and this rich rascal is always to be found leading some crusade for "economy" in education. The "economy" is to be made by increasing the number of pupils instructed by each teacher and reducing the salary paid to the teacher. The fellow's object is clear. Who would read his puerile papers if we had an intelligent and instructed race? The late Lord Salisbury once said that Lord Northcliffe founded the "Daily Mail" for those who could not think, and then founded the "Daily Mirror" for those who could not read ; and it might seem to Lord Salisbury, if he were alive, that the mass of the stuff sold on the book-stalls to-day, like the majority of moving-pictures, was invented by the half-educated for the half-witted.

It is not difficult to account for the fall in the educational standard. The demand for labour and for soldiers during the War resulted, with the connivance of the Government, in the slack ad-

ministration of the Education Acts, and great numbers of boys and girls were withdrawn from school earlier than was lawful or allowed to attend it so intermittently that they derived very little advantage from the skilled instruction they were given. Most of the youths who were preparing themselves to go up to the universities when the War began, went to the trenches instead. When those of them who survived were at last able to resume their civil lives, the majority of them gave up all thought of a university education and tried to catch up with the years they had lost ; and they began the business of a man's life without the best part of the equipment. The few who decided to go to the universities found themselves unable to work up to the pre-War standards because their minds had been worn down and fatigued in France. And so the standards were dropped. In the elementary school, in the intermediate school and in the university, admittedly or unadmittedly, the standards were dropped. It is scarcely realised that the action of the Government in permitting the early withdrawal of children from elementary schools or their intermittent attendance at them has landed us with large numbers of young men and women between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five who can neither read nor write. There are no statistics available to prove or disprove the statement, but I think it is true that there are more

illiterates in this island to-day, between the ages named, than there have been at any period since the passage of the first Free Education Act fifty-four years ago. It is not now uncommon for a young man to inform the magistrates that he cannot read. On February 12, 1924, a youth, aged seventeen, gave evidence as a witness in a case heard at Oldbury, near Birmingham. He had had some schooling, but he was unable to read the oath.¹ His is one of a number of similar cases within my personal knowledge, and I do not think I am exaggerating when I assert that there is an unknown, but very large, number of young persons between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five who are, in the strict meaning of the word, illiterate; and since many of them are also neurotic it is not easy to see what good they will do their country.

It is notorious that even in Scotland the standards of education have dropped. The old love of learning, striven for almost desperately, which distinguished the Scottish people above the English people, may still be preserved in the Highlands, although I have heard that doubted, but it is less firmly preserved in the Lowlands; and Glasgow is better known for its drunkards than for its scholars. Professor John Burnet,

¹ This case was reported in the "Birmingham Post" of February 13, 1924.

delivering the Romanes Lecture for 1923 on the subject of Ignorance, said :

. . . there are warnings and portents at the present day such as have before now heralded an age of darkness. It is no wonder that some who are skilled in reading the signs of the times should feel uneasy.

Speaking out of his experience in Scotland, he said :

I have no doubt that the young men of the present day are, on the whole, healthier in body and mind and more intelligent than those of my own generation . . .

a statement with which Professor Burnet will not find everyone in agreement :

On the other hand, I am certain that the young men of to-day are absolutely and relatively more ignorant than those of forty years ago and, what is worse, that they have less curiosity and intellectual independence. In Scotland, at any rate, this is true. Every university teacher in that country whose memory can carry him back a generation knows that we have had to lower our standards of teaching and examination progressively for the last thirty years in every department except the physical and natural sciences. . . .

I invite the reader to consider Professor Burnet's assertion that "the young men of to-day are absolutely and relatively more ignorant than those of forty years ago, and what is worse, that they have less curiosity and intellectual independence". I have tried to convince him of my belief that Ignorance in itself is not a calamity, and that it

is possible for a nation to be great although the majority of its people are illiterate. But I do not believe that a nation can continue to be great when its youth have lost their curiosity and their intellectual independence. All growth and development and progress are the result of inquisitiveness. A boy plays with a kettle, and becomes the inventor of the steam-engine. A youth wastes his time in keeping pigeons, and discovers the Darwinian theory of evolution. If our young men and women are not full of enquiry and refuse to go on adventures, then we shall stagnate. One of the reasons why the theatre in New York is so much more interesting than the theatre in London is that the audience in New York is more adventurous, more willing to make experiments, than the audience in London. Curiosity, the spirit of enquiry, is immensely important in the life of the drama. If that spirit is weak or dead, then the drama will be weak or dead.

The lack of curiosity and intellectual independence in our youth may be a passing characteristic and of no greater importance than the lack of curiosity in a sick person, but we must not get into the habit of attributing all the ills of our society to the War. The majority of them afflicted us long before the War began. It may surprise the reader to learn that many of the boys and girls who pass through our council schools com-

pletely forget how to write within a few years of doing so. The life into which they enter when they leave the care of their teachers makes no demand on their minds. Many of them rarely use a pen after they leave school, and so the power to write becomes atrophied. Imagine a boy or a girl, leaving school at the age of thirteen or fourteen, and beginning to earn a living in a factory. There he or she is, for so many hours of every working day, performing, not a job, but a minute part of a job. It is a common thing in a modern factory to find that a small operation, such as pasting a picture on the lid of a chocolate-box, is subdivided among several persons, each of whom does a trifling part of it. This dull, undemanding work, in which it is impossible for any human being to take an interest, continues for long spells through the most impressionable years of crowds of boys and girls. At the end of four or five years from the time they left school, instructed children, they have become uninstructed men and women in whose minds little dull ruts have been made. Their bodies are ill-nourished and their minds are starved, and they have no curiosity or any power to feel curiosity about matters of importance. Their appetite, physical and mental, can only be stimulated by coarse and exciting food.

Town labourers commonly deride country

labourers for the dullness of their lives and work, but who that knows the lives and work of both of these labourers can doubt for a second that the countryman has a finer and more varied and more interesting job than the townsman. The countryman has not got the feverish quickness which townsmen have, but neither has he got the sickly stupidity which many of them have ; and on the whole he has a surer judgment. How can the farm labourer help being superior as a human being to the factory labourer who does only a small part of a job which often would not be worth doing even if he did the whole of it? The farm labourer has a variety of knowledge which is unknown to the townsman, unaware even that there is such a variety of knowledge to be known. What is a farm labourer? He is something of a veterinary surgeon, having knowledge of animals in sickness and in health ; he is something of a geologist, having knowledge of the nature of soils and their vagaries ; he is something of a meteorologist, having knowledge of wind and weather ; and in addition to all this varied knowledge, he must possess some understanding of men and markets. He knows about trees and plants and birds and animals and crops and land and has a store of inherited knowledge which serves him very faithfully in the crises of his life. A ploughman has a skill in making

long, straight furrows which is beyond the imagination of a machine-minder in a modern factory, and he has the supreme joy of beginning and ending a job. He turns up the ground and sows the seed and watches it grow up into the blade and sees the ears filling and ripening. And he reaps what he has sown. What townsman can compare with this man in his range of knowledge and employment? It was from a society of men, so various in their information and their work as that, that the Elizabethans sprang. Our society is not a society, mainly of agriculturalists, but of town labourers, narrow in their knowledge, whose work becomes more and more mechanical and less and less able to exercise their minds. They are the servants of machines which hardly need their service.

ii

Our young Shakespeare, then, venturing into London with the MS. of "Hamlet" in his pocket finds himself in a difficult situation. He comes to town at a very hard time. The normal distress of the Machine Age has been increased by the confusion and exhaustion of the War. He finds that society has been turned topsy turvy: people who were well off before the War are less well off or badly off, while a number of persons who

were not particularly well off before the War have become very rich. The middle class is definitely impoverished, and masses of working people are unemployed and suffering from the demoralisation which always follows on prolonged periods of unemployment. The result of this change in the fortunes of the nation is that educated persons who formerly went to the theatre many times now either do not go at all or go infrequently, while the people who filled their pockets while other people were filling graves go very often and occupy the most expensive seats. It is true to say that in the years immediately following the Armistice, the stalls and dress-circle of the West End theatres were mainly occupied by persons who had the means to live a cultured life, but had not got the mentality to do so. That is not so true now, but it is still true enough to be important. Its importance will be obvious when I state that a theatre depends for its existence on the patronage of the people who buy the expensive seats. The pit and the gallery may be overcrowded at every performance, but unless there are many people sitting in the dress-circle and the stalls, the play is a financial failure. The theatre manager, therefore, although he might like to provide the kind of play which appeals to the intelligent poor, is compelled to provide the kind of play which appeals to the unintelligent rich.

The cost of admission, including Entertainment Tax, to the stalls of a West End theatre is twelve shillings: the cost of admission to the gallery is one shilling and eightpence; and, therefore, in money, though not in brains, one person in the stalls is equal to seven persons in the gallery. This fact cannot be disregarded by any theatre manager, however high his ambitions and ideals may be. He might prefer to have his plays performed before a pit of philosophers, but the fact of finance compels him to cater for a dress-circle and stalls of profiteers.

I wish the reader to imagine himself in possession of a West End theatre. He has drawn up a statement of his expenditure, and finds that he cannot possibly conduct his theatre on less than £1,200 or £1,300 per week. His weekly rent may be anything from £250 to £600. An average rent in London to-day is £400 per week. To this sum must be added the salaries of the actors, the salaries of the managerial staff, the wages of the scene-shifters, electricians, cleaners and other employees, the cost of the orchestra, the cost of advertising, lighting, heating and a variety of other matters, including the royalty paid to the author of the play. All these charges, which continue whether the play is a success or not, must be met before a penny of profit is made for the manager, and they cannot well be reduced

below the sums I have named, £1,200 or £1,300 per week. Even a small inexpensively conducted theatre like the Playhouse in Liverpool costs the better part of £500 per week to run.¹ A manager, faced with these charges, dare not make experiments or take risks with a population of playgoers such as we have in England to-day. Before the War, he could conduct a whole season on a capital of £5,000, but to-day he can hardly conduct a single play on that sum. The preliminary expenses of putting the play on the stage, together with the ordinary running expenses while it is being performed, make £5,000 look like one and ninepence at the end of the first fortnight. For the preliminary expenses of production are very heavy, and have to be met immediately. If the play is rehearsed for a fortnight in a closed theatre, the rent has still to be paid, although not one farthing is coming into the box-office. A habit has grown up among the gamblers who are now exploiting the West End theatre of demanding that the rent of the theatre shall be paid for four weeks in advance. A premium is sometimes de-

¹ We used to estimate at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, when I was manager there, that our weekly expenses could not be reduced below £100, although the highest salary paid to anyone connected with the theatre was £5 per week. The entire company was paid a sweated wage, but the theatre was tiny and we had no rich man to support us. We lived very barely. Our scenery was seldom renewed, and was so decrepit that it sometimes fell to pieces. But living as sparsely as that, we could not pay our way on less than £100 per week.

manded for the mere privilege of entering the theatre at all, just as premiums were demanded from people seeking houses during the House Shortage. A share in the profits is occasionally demanded, and certain seats in the more expensive parts of the theatre are reserved by the owners and sold by them to the public. The libraries which purchase blocks of seats at reduced prices from the managers and sell them at enhanced prices to the public, do not pay for the seats when they buy them, but at the end of a month or so.

All this means that a capital of £5,000 for the production of a single play is not a penny too much, and may even be pounds too little. If the play is not an immediate success, then it is an immediate failure, for the manager cannot now afford to "nurse" it into popularity as he was able to do before the War. A manager, before 1914, regarded the first week or two, or even the first month of performance, as a period when he "nursed" his production into favour. At the end of that period, it was either a success or an undoubted failure. The play called "Romance" was a failure when it was first performed in a theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue—so much so that the owner of the theatre gave Miss Doris Keane notice that he would not permit it to be acted any longer. Managers do not care to have their

theatres associated with failures. Miss Keane then removed the play to another theatre—the Duke of York's, I think—and “nursed” it through a precarious period until it became a great commercial success and made a large fortune for all who were concerned in it. If Miss Doris Keane were producing “Romance” to-day for the first time in the West End of London at a theatre costing £400 per week, it would not, if it were received as it was on its actual production, be able to live after the first fortnight had passed, because neither she nor anyone else with average theatrical means could afford to bear the cost of “nursing” it into popularity. Those are the plain facts of the situation. When I set them out in the “Observer” people wrote to me and asked why it was that “Abraham Lincoln” contrived to run for so long a period. They did not know that the rent of the Lyric Opera House at Hammer-smith, where Mr. Drinkwater's play was performed, is only £25 per week, and that this sum is covered by sub-letting the bars and the right of selling the programmes to contractors. In other words, Mr. Nigel Playfair and his co-directors get the Lyric Opera House free of charge. We may well wonder what chance of success “Abraham Lincoln”, with its long and expensive cast, would have had in a West End theatre at a rental of £400 or £500 per week.

The preliminary costs of producing "Hassan" at His Majesty's Theatre were between £15,000 and £18,000, and the running expenses were about £2,000 per week. If we assume that a profit of £1,000 per week was made during the greater part of the period the play was performed, we see that the management did not begin to make any profit whatever until it had been played to packed houses for nearly five months. These are terrifying figures which may well daunt the boldest adventurer into theatrical management; and when our young Shakespeare carries his "Hamlet" to the West End and discovers the facts of finance, and learns that the manager has to depend for his living on the custom of a mass of unintelligent and tasteless people, he can hardly be blamed if he decides that for the future he will practise some other form of writing than that of plays.

In the condition of our theatre to-day, not only is the author of a masterpiece, if there be one, likely to be denied all opportunity of seeing it performed, but also he is likely to be discouraged from trying to write plays at all. The craft of the dramatist is a very difficult one, more difficult than that of the novelist, but the rewards which are earned by successful practitioners of it are so great that it tempts many to learn it. But the difficulty of getting a play of distinction produced discourages many men of quality from continuing

to practise the craft, and I suggest to the reader that the poverty of the average play as compared with the average novel is due to the fact that the difficulties in the way of getting any play produced are so stupendous that men of distinction will not consent to cope with them. ' When a man writes a novel, he has a fair hope of getting it published, although he may not make much money out of its sale ; but when a man writes a play he has very little hope of getting it performed, and since mankind is swayed by the justifiable vanity of wishing to receive recognition for work done, the men who might enrich the quality of our drama direct their abilities to other forms of writing. There is hardly any inducement for a man to devote himself to mastering the craft of play-writing when he surveys the theatrical situation and sees, on the one hand, a highly expensive and commercialised institution in the West End which is compelled, because of its cost, to cater for the largest crowd, the unintelligentsia, and, on the other hand, a few scattered and unrelated repertory theatres, living from hand to mouth and in constant danger of being bankrupted if they produce a play above the mind of a message boy. Our young Shakespeare would, I think, abandon the theatre for ever and expend his imagination in other ways.

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If the young Shakespeare is to be kept to the writing of plays we must somehow organise the theatre so that he shall be able to make a living out of it. He can earn a living in what is called the commercial theatre, and a very handsome living, too, if he will write the kind of plays which are wanted by the managers of commercial theatres (not, however, with "Hamlets"), but he cannot earn a living in the repertory theatres. It seems to me that the future of the repertory theatres depends upon this point. Their position, at the time of writing, is precarious, and most of them are sponging on the pockets of a few persons with a high sense of civic life, and on the brains and energies of the authors, the actors and the directors. The Birmingham Repertory Theatre would never have come into existence at all, or remained there for as long as it did, but for the munificence of Mr. Barry Jackson, whose civic consciousness is a pattern to the rest of the community. The Gaiety Theatre in Manchester was kept alive by the money of Miss Horniman and the devotion of its actors and actresses who received modest salaries. The Abbey Theatre in Dublin lived for years on the bounty of Miss Horniman and has periodically had to send round

the hat (principally among the English people) to keep itself out of debt. Its actors and actresses, as I have already stated, when they were paid at all were paid sweated wages. The Playhouse in Liverpool has been kept alive by the generosity of one or two persons who have never failed it even when the inhabitants of Liverpool were failing it hard. If men of civic conscience were to withdraw from the direction of the repertory theatres, all of them would immediately collapse. We saw what happened when Miss Horniman left the Gaiety in Manchester : it became a picture palace. It may be said, and justly said, that if the people do not want these theatres, there is no sense in trying to keep them alive ; but what a condemnation of us that is if it be true.

I am a repertory theatre man. I assert that these small and harassed theatres have done great service to the community. They were on the point of reaping the reward of their work when the War for Culture began. An audience had been created for meritable plays in various cities, and that audience, although it was not extravagantly large, was large enough for practical purposes, and it was growing. The Birmingham Repertory Theatre provided a training ground for Mr. John Drinkwater, whose play, " Abraham Lincoln ", would probably not have been produced at all if its performance had depended upon the judgment of

a West End manager. It was in this theatre, too, that Mr. Rutland Boughton's opera, "The Immortal Hour", was given suitable introduction to the general public. The Abbey Theatre in Dublin was the training ground of John Millington Synge and Lady Gregory and Mr. Lennox Robinson, to name the more prominent of its dramatists. Had it not been in existence the singular genius of Synge might never have been directed towards drama at all, but whether it would or not, can we believe that any West End manager would have given house-room to "The Playboy of the Western World" or "Riders to the Sea"? The Gaiety in Manchester was the training ground of Stanley Houghton, Mr. Charles McEvoy and Mr. Allan Monkhouse. I do not believe that any West End manager would have accepted "Hindle Wakes" had Houghton first offered it to one. The Playhouse in Liverpool was the training ground of one of the cleverest of our revue writers, Mr. Ronald Jeans. And the Court in London, under the Vedrenne-Barker management (which may be described as the source from which the repertory theatres drew most of their strength), was the theatre in which Mr. Shaw, Mr. Galsworthy, Mr. Granville-Barker, the late St. John Hankin and many others were brought before the general public. In short, the most substantial names in modern English drama belong

to men who learned their craft and were given their first opportunities in repertory theatres. Mr. Eugene O'Neill, the most interesting of American dramatists, learnt his job and got his first opportunities in small theatres near Washington Square ; and M. Jacques Copeau, in the Vieux-Colombier in Paris, has provided a similar training ground for young French dramatists of the quality of M. Charles Vildrac.

And if we turn from dramatists to plays, we find that the repertory theatres have not only done valuable work in training and encouraging young dramatists whose work, but for the existence of the repertory theatres, would probably not have been produced at all, but in addition have enabled provincial playgoers to see the work of established dramatists, foreign and native. It is unlikely, had there not been any repertory theatres in England, that multitudes of provincial playgoers would ever have seen the work of great dramatists of all ages and races such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann, Schnitzler, Maeterlinck, Rostand, Verhaeren, Sudermann, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, Arnold Bennett, Harley Granville-Barker and John Masefield, among the moderns, and Euripides, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Congreve, Beaumont and Fletcher, Goldsmith and Sheridan among the classics. Plays by all these authors were pro-

duced by Miss Horniman in Manchester. Does anyone imagine that many of them would ever have been introduced to the Manchester public but for her? *

The gifts bestowed upon the community by the repertory theatres were not confined to plays. They included training grounds for actors and actresses such as were not to be found anywhere else in England. The Repertory Theatre in Liverpool enriched English acting to a quite extraordinary extent, and I believe it is true to say that more of the best of our actors and actresses learned their job in Williamson Square than in any other part of the country. The Gaiety in Manchester gave many fine players, including Miss

* This is a common record in the history of a repertory theatre, even after the War. A correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" (March 11, 1924) concludes an article with the following statement:

"It will be seen that the real glory of the Munich theatres lies in the courage of their repertory and their stagecraft. During the past four months, by attending theatres four or five times a week, I have seen from one to four plays by the following authors: Ibsen, Andreyev, Wedekind, Goldoni, Tolstoy, Grillparzer, Lessing, Hebbel, Kleist, Fulda, Thomas Mann, Hofmannstal, Georg Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Calderon, Cervantes, Molière, Sophocles, Euripides, Molnar, Kapèk, Strindberg, Schnitzler, Björnson, Chekhov, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Herman Bahr, Hartleben, Shaw, Marlowe, Wilde, Shakespeare, Schiller, Goethe, and many others who are too new or too unimportant to mention. From this list, which I have written off haphazardly, with no attempt at classification, it is obvious that the Munich repertory swings from the most ancient and classic on the one side to the most modern and impressionistic on the other, and taps the best drama of at least a dozen nations. And this in a city with one-tenth of the population of London."

Sybil Thorndike, to the West End. And what is true of these two theatres is true in some degree of all the others. Mr. Basil Dean learned his job as a producer in repertory theatres, and Mr. George Harris, the decorative artist, learned his in Liverpool. Mr. Norman MacDermott, of the Everyman Theatre at Hampstead, introduced the work of Mr. Eugene O'Neill to London, and is now feeding the West End with some of its best plays. Whatever may be said against the repertory theatres—and much has been said, justly and unjustly—this remains true that they have all given more to the community than the community gave to them. No one who sets out to compile the history of the English theatre in the past thirty years can escape from the fact that if the repertory theatres had not existed, the records in that time would have been nearly barren.

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The organised theatre will have to be built up from the ruins of the repertory theatre, but before we make plans for it, we had better consider the defects in the structure of the repertory theatres which caused them to fall so precipitately when the War began. They suffered, and still suffer, those of them that survive, from a number of faults of which the gravest was, and is, their

isolation from each other. The Gaiety in Manchester was barely aware of the existence of the Playhouse in Liverpool, and was almost ignorant of the existence of the Repertory in Birmingham. None of them were able to associate on terms of equality with the Abbey in Dublin because it is too small to be profitable to touring companies. (So is the Repertory in Birmingham.) The Irish Players, until the middle of the War, went every year to the Playhouse in Liverpool, but the Playhouse company could not go to the Abbey because even if they played to "capacity", the size of the theatre would not permit the assemblage of an audience large enough to enable them to pay their expenses, apart altogether from making a profit. It is customary for the proceeds of a performance to be divided equally between the managers of the theatre and the managers of the visiting company. I doubt whether the gross receipts at the Abbey, in normal circumstances, exceed £200 per week. That sum, equally divided between the management of the theatre and the management of the visiting company, would clearly result in a very heavy loss for the visiting company. Indeed, if the whole of the gross proceeds were given to the visiting company at the Abbey, there would probably be a loss to them on their visit. There certainly would not be a profit.

The effects of this isolation of the repertory theatres from each other were deplorable, and at length, almost fatal. They would long ago have been fatal had it not been for the munificence of individuals, such as Miss Horniman, Mr. Jackson and Colonel Shute. One of them was the obvious fact that the repertory theatre did not offer an adequate financial inducement to the dramatist to work for it. *It actually offered, and still offers, less financial inducement to the dramatist than he receives from amateur companies.* People of the theatre hardly realise that many dramatists earn considerable sums of money from the performance of their plays by amateurs. Two well-known dramatists have personally told me that they earn something like a thousand pounds a year from amateur performances of their work. The author of a popular one-act play told me that it brought him a steady income of two hundred pounds a year from amateur performances. This is a means of earning a living from play writing, which is confined at present almost exclusively to the authors of light comedies, but there are signs already that it will not continue to be so exclusively theirs. An amateur society, now and then, ventures to produce more substantial stuff and is not daunted by the result from repeating the experiment. Some societies are even producing plays which have never been performed on the professional stage

at all, and I think it may fairly be said that the increase in the publication of plays since the Armistice is largely due to the fact that amateur societies are more ambitious in their range than they were before the War, and that they are no longer content to live upon the crumbs which drop from the West End table. There will, in time, have to be some organisation of amateur societies of a loose sort so that they may more easily become acquainted with new plays and shall not have to pay fees which include a very heavy commission to agents. The most important agency for amateur productions charges authors a percentage of twenty-five per cent. on the sums received for the performance of their plays. This is an outrageous commission and obviously comes out of the funds of the amateur societies : authors could afford to accept lower fees if the commission were the fair one of ten per cent. That, however, is a small matter, easily adjusted when the amateur societies have federated themselves.

But amateur societies, however interesting and remunerative to the author they may be, cannot adequately perform the work of the professional theatre. The fact that they are chiefly organised for the entertainment of their acting members makes this impossible. Large sums of money are, no doubt, earned by oil and colour merchants from the activities of young ladies and gentlemen

who dabble in painting, but the increase in the stature and magnitude of painting will be made, not by amateurs passing away the time, but by painters to whom the painting of pictures is both a passion and a profession. We must continue to look into the professional theatre for the means of restoring the drama to a state of health. The isolated repertory theatre is a hopeless institution, despite the fine record it holds, because its means and range are limited and the conditions under which it is conducted are too laborious. The fact that the repertory theatres are not federated in some form means that a dramatist cannot count on receiving any other than a few disjointed performances of his play in a given year. As things are, a play may be produced at the Playhouse in Liverpool for anything from two to four weeks, after which it is played no more for several years in that theatre. Great trouble has been expended in rehearsing the play and in preparing "sets" for it, but at the end of a fortnight or a month the work is scrapped, and the company, which has during the period of performance been rehearsing another play for which another "set" has to be made or adapted from existing "sets", produces with equal labour and difficulty a second piece which will, in its turn, be scrapped. A new play of my own, entitled "The Ship", was performed at the Playhouse, Liverpool, for a fort-

night in 1922. At the end of that time it was withdrawn so that the preparations for the Christmas play could be completed. My royalties for the first week amounted to £20 11s. 2d., and for the second week to £28 4s. 1d. The play was not performed again until the beginning of 1924, when it was included in the programme of the Little Theatre at Bristol, which is about half the size of the Playhouse. It was performed there for a week, and the royalties amounted to £14 12s. 8d. A discussion of the merits of my play is not in question here, nor am I the proper person to conduct it—naturally I think it is a good play, or I would not have written it or have allowed it to be performed—and I am concerned only with the question of an author making a livelihood out of his work in the repertory theatre. The managers of both these repertory theatres tell me that "The Ship" was a financial success, in that it more than paid its way, but no one can say that it has been a financial success, so far as its author is concerned, when his total earnings from it in three years, counting from the time it was written, amount to £63 7s. 11d., out of which he has to pay an agency commission of ten per cent. I have not, in fact, earned ten shillings per week from "The Ship", although it took longer to write and cost me more trouble than a popular piece out of which I earned several

thousand pounds. This latter piece has, in fact, earned more money for me from amateur performances than "The Ship" earned in the repertory theatres.

I make no apology for intruding these financial details into this work. I did not make the world and am not responsible for the fact that rent must be paid and food and clothing bought. In a reasonable world, no doubt, an author would write solely for the honour and glory of the thing, but this is not a reasonable world, and the honour and glory which I receive from the repertory theatres make no impression whatever on landlords and butchers and grocers and tailors. It is because of this inability of the repertory theatre to provide the dramatist with a modest livelihood that he does not, as I should like him to do, turn first to the repertory theatres for the chance of getting his play performed. He looks first, and in most cases only, to the West End stage or its equivalent in America. If that fails him, he may turn at last to the repertory theatre, but he is more likely to be discouraged from play writing altogether and to turn to some other form of writing which is less difficult in its incidence and more certain in its remuneration.

The situation, from the point of view of the company acting in the repertory theatre, is as bad as it is from the point of view of the

dramatist, except that the actor gets rather more money out of it than the dramatist does. Each production is done in a feverish fashion—especially when the programme is changed weekly—with the result that the actors, who spend the morning and afternoon rehearsing one play, and the evening in acting another, seldom get time to learn their words thoroughly and never get time in which to settle themselves in their parts. Even when plays are rehearsed for a fortnight, it is not uncommon for the first two public performances to resemble ragged dress rehearsals. The audience declines in quantity because the performance is poor—in reality the performance is marvellous, considering the circumstances in which it is given—and the actors are disheartened because their work is so scantily rewarded. Another defect in the present repertory system is that audiences see the same company too often and tire of it. A playgoer who goes to all the plays produced in a repertory theatre in a season will see each of the players perhaps twenty times! In theatres where the programme is changed weekly, he will, if he goes each week in the customary season of forty weeks, see each player about forty times! The regular playgoer in London, with his choice of some thirty theatres to patronise, may not see a particular player more than once or twice in a year or even a longer period. There is, there-

fore, little likelihood of the West End playgoer becoming bored by seeing the same set of players too often. There is every likelihood of him doing so in the repertory theatre. After some experience, and much thought, about the theatre, I have come to the conclusion that the repertory system, as we know it, is wasteful and unprofitable, cannot, indeed, be otherwise than wasteful and unprofitable, and that it will have to be re-organised if it is to survive on an economic basis. If the existing repertory theatres in England were all to produce my play, "The Ship", they would each have to make a separate "production", involving the expenditure of money on separate "sets" and separate series of rehearsals, but if they were to pool their resources, one production would probably serve for all of them.

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Let us imagine that there is a repertory theatre in Belfast, Birmingham, Bristol, Dublin, Liverpool and Manchester. If these six theatres are federated to this extent, that the managers of them periodically meet and state what plays they propose to produce during the coming season, it will be possible for them to arrange a short circuit of plays through the six cities in the following fashion. The company in Belfast produces a new

play or revives an old one for, say, a fortnight. At the end of that time it moves on to Dublin, where it repeats the performance for another fortnight. It then goes, in turn, to Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, playing in each city for a fortnight. During this tour it rehearses a new play, and at the end of the fortnight in Liverpool, it returns to its base in Belfast, where the new play is produced for the first time. While the Belfast company is moving round in this manner, the other companies are moving round in a similar manner. This system, which I have very roughly outlined, is based on the assumption that each of the repertory theatres is more or less of the same size and capacity. In my mind's eye, I see a handsome civic theatre in each of these cities, with a handsome hostel nearby in which the companies can be decently housed and fed during their visits without the harassment of searching for lodgings immediately on arrival in each town, after, perhaps, a long and fatiguing journey. But that is, and will probably for some time remain, a vision.

. If some such system as this were in working order each of the six cities, in a season of forty weeks, would see performed in its repertory theatre twenty different meritable plays acted by six different groups of actors and actresses. These actors and actresses would not be overworked as

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repertory actors and actresses now are, and the quality of their acting would enormously improve, because they would be delivered, on the one hand, from the defects inherent in what may be called the improvised productions of the repertory theatres, and, on the other hand, the deadening "long runs" of the West End theatres. Each play would be performed for twelve weeks, and the dramatist, though he would not make a fortune or anything like a fortune, would at least receive a fair sum of money for his work. He would still have the opportunity of a production in the West End and in America as well as in other provincial cities than those included in my imaginary "short circuit". There might be a number of "short circuits". There might, for example, be a four-city circuit, comprising Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow, with a possible extension of its services to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The group of large towns and cities in Yorkshire might form a circuit. The smaller towns of Lancashire might combine in yet another. Groups of towns in the south of England, Portsmouth, Southampton, Reading, Exeter, Bath and Plymouth, could form a circuit. It is clear that the provinces might be organised into a substantial number of "short circuits", each town in the circuit being within easy distance of all the others. And it might happen that a dramatist's play would

be performed for anything from four to twelve weeks by each of these circuits in a year. His regular income would then be substantial enough to justify him in devoting his energies to writing plays, especially as he would still have the prospect of West End and American productions. The opportunities for obtaining production would be greatly increased because the risk of financial disaster as a result of making experiments of producing "un-commercial" plays would be greatly decreased. It must be obvious that an organisation so costly as the West End theatre must have a sterilising effect on the mind of the dramatist. Either he will cease to write plays at all, or he will strive to write only the sort that is likely to draw the largest crowd. If we cannot somehow re-arrange the finances of the theatre, then the theatre will degenerate to the condition in which it was between the time of Sheridan and the time of Tom Robertson.

The objection offered to my scheme is that it is the present touring system under another name, but I do not regard this objection as a substantial one. There is no particular virtue in immobility. On the contrary, there may be positive vice in it. The claim made for the immobile stock or repertory company is that its members are able to lead a settled life in one place and to fulfil the functions of a citizen. It seems very thin

when examined in the light of experience. The majority of repertory actors do not belong to the city in which they are acting, nor do they remain in it, as a general rule, for more than two or three years. The circumstances of their lives remove them from ordinary social arrangements, for they are working at hours when the majority of people are not working, and are taking their recreation, when they are taking any at all, at a time when the rest of the community is employed in earning its living. Even Sunday, for the repertory actor, as for the actor on tour, is seldom a day when he is free to associate with his fellow citizens in the ordinary routine of civic life. In short, the ideal of a citizen's life for the actor, which was once so stoutly cherished by Mr. Granville-Barker and Mr. Lewis Casson, is only possible to a limited extent in London under the system of "long-runs" which Mr. Granville-Barker and Mr. Lewis Casson and everyone connected with what may be called the reasonable theatre has heartily cursed. It has been said, too, that my system would have the effect of limiting the repertory actor to a very few parts. If he were a member of a six-city "short-circuit" group, he would probably play only three or four parts in a season of forty weeks. That is true, although the number could be increased by the performance of one-act plays,

but this objection seems to me to have less in it than there seems to be. It is obviously better for an actor to play skilfully three or four parts in a season than to play fifteen to twenty parts in a makeshift manner. The majority of actors, especially in the West End, do not play anything like three or four parts in a season. Many of them play only one part which, in a successful play, may employ them for a year or even longer, but, in an unsuccessful play, may not employ them for a fortnight. The short-circuit system of my imagination is a compromise between the haste and inefficiency of the existing repertory system and the insecurity and deadening effect of the existing West End system. We have, on the one hand, actors reduced to the use of tricks in acting because they have not got time in which to study a part properly, and, on the other hand, reduced to the level of machines because they have to repeat the same words—perhaps only two or three hundred of them—every night, except Sunday, and on two afternoons each week for a period that may range, when the play is successful, from six months to the record run of nearly five years for “Chu Chin Chow”. It will not be contended that any actor, playing a part in a piece which has run for a year or two, is doing anything more than earning a salary. Not even the actor himself, however glad he may be to have earned

a salary during that time, will contend that he is increasing his range as an actor.

My "short-circuit" system differs profoundly from the present touring system in more than one respect. The present system is unbelievably wasteful and exhausting. A company may be performing in Bristol this week and in Glasgow next week and in Leeds or Birmingham the week after. Can any system be more stupid than that, involving as it does long and expensive and infinitely tiring railway journeys during which the company is generally doubling on its tracks? If provincial theatres were federated into groups of short-circuit repertory theatres such as I have proposed, the wastefulness and weariness of the present touring system would immediately be abolished, players would be given more variety of parts and greater security of life, and playgoers would be given a wider range of plays, especially of new ones, more variety of players and better acting. The repertory theatres which exist in England at the time when this is being written are terribly hampered by the difficulty their managers have in obtaining new plays. An author looks first to the West End for production, and if he obtains it there, he generally sells the provincial rights in his play to the West End manager. This prevents him from letting the manager of a repertory theatre do the play until

the West End manager has exhausted the touring rights. No manager will consent to give up the prospect of a profitable engagement, say, in Liverpool, so that the play may be performed by the company acting at the repertory theatre in that city. The result is that the latter has to depend for its productions on revivals of old plays or on plays which have either not been performed in the provinces because they were failures in London or on new plays which the authors cannot get performed anywhere else. This difficulty would, I think, disappear if the provincial theatre were organised in the way I have suggested, because the author could count on a sufficient number of performances in a given time to make it profitable for him to let his play be done in the repertory theatres simultaneously with its production in London or even before its production there. In Germany, before the War, it was common for a play to be produced simultaneously in a great many theatres all over the country, so that an author in a single week had his work performed several hundred times, although at no one of the theatres, had it a long "run"

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And here I wish, in a short digression, to state my disbelief in the sort of repertory system ad-

vocated by Mr. William Archer and Mr. Granville-Barker. When they speak of a repertory theatre they mean one where the programme is changed nightly or every second night, and not one where it is changed every week. For good or ill, this sort of theatre is not popular in England, particularly in London, and in my judgment it is almost hopeless ever to expect it to be popular. Unless a very large company is employed by the managers of such a theatre, so that one play may be rehearsed by one set of players while another is being performed by another set, the work simply cannot be done with anything approximating to efficiency. The maintenance of such a large company would be enormously expensive and, in these times, prohibitive. Mr. Granville-Barker himself had experience of the difficulty of conducting a theatre on such lines when he and Mr. Dion Boucicault in conjunction with the late Charles Frohman ran a repertory theatre at the Duke of York's Theatre in London in 1910. The season lasted for seventeen weeks—from February 21st to June 17th—during which time eight new plays were produced and two old ones were revived. The following is a list of the plays and their authors :

" Justice "	by John Galsworthy.
" Misalliance " . . .	by Bernard Shaw.
" Old Friends " . . .	by J. M. Barrie.
" The Sentimentalists " .	by George Meredith.

- " The Twelve-Pound Look " . by J. M. Barrie.
" The Madras House " . by H. Granville-Barker.
" Helena's Path " . . . by Anthony Hope and Cosmo
Gordon-Lennox.
" Chains " by Elizabeth Baker.
" Trelawney of the Wells " . by A. W. Pinero.
" Prunella " by H. Granville-Barker and
Laurence Housman.

Three of these plays, the third, fourth and fifth in the list, were in one act and were performed in " a triple bill ". In an article in the " Encyclopædia Britannica ", I referred to this repertory season in these terms : " The original scheme, of a strictly repertory theatre similar to the Comédie Française, was not maintained, nor does the history of the repertory theatres in Great Britain and Ireland indicate that such a scheme is ever likely to succeed in a country where the people are disinclined to make the research through newspaper advertisements which a programme of irregular performances involves. For good or ill, the system of continuous performances has obtained a hold on the British theatre which will not easily be shaken off and may never be shaken off. ' Trelawney of the Wells ', the most popular of the plays produced during this season, was played for forty-two performances in a season of seventeen weeks, which clearly signifies that the promoters of the scheme had to revise their plan, partly to satisfy the public demand and partly to recoup themselves for the losses sustained on

the unpopular pieces. A similar history has attended the establishment of other repertory theatres on Comédie Française lines in England, for example, the Everyman Theatre at Hampstead, established there in 1920 by Mr. Norman MacDermott."

The popular dislike of this "chopping and changing" is a sufficient argument against it, but the other arguments, of prohibitive cost where a large company is employed or of overwork and inefficient performance where a small company is employed, are equally strong. It must not be forgotten that the company employed at the Comédie Française is poorly paid, unless its members are given a share of the profits. The system was not easily possible before the War: it is impossible now.

vii

I do not think I am making excessive claims for my system of "short-circuit" repertory theatres when I say that if it were in operation there would be greater stability in the theatre, for the actors, the authors and the audiences, than there now is, and that writers, feeling sure that their plays would have considerable likelihood of getting produced and of making a livelihood for their authors, would turn their minds more seriously

to play writing than they do at present. But how is such a state of affairs to be brought about? In Birmingham, the small repertory theatre, owned and maintained by Mr. Barry Jackson, had seats only for about four hundred persons. If three thousand people out of the total population of a million persons had visited the Birmingham Repertory theatre each week, plays would have been performed there to "packed houses". Experience showed that not more than half that number, about 1,500 people out of a million, went to the theatre each week. If one person out of every hundred and twenty-five of the inhabitants of Liverpool (another city in and around which there are a million people) were to visit the Playhouse once a week, it would be a great financial success. But here, as in Birmingham and elsewhere, the requisite number of playgoers is not to be found. In Birmingham, so I was told by correspondents, poor people and young students of small means could not go to the Repertory at all, or could go only at rare intervals because it contained no cheap seats. The fact that something like two millions of unemployed people have been living in Great Britain for the past two or three years has harmed the repertory theatres more even than it has harmed the ordinary theatres. Wherever, indeed, we turn in considering the state of the theatre, we find ourselves confronted by a

high, thick wall of economic fact. The War caused the standards to be lowered and has prevented us from raising them again because of the economic chaos in which the whole of Europe remains.

But even if the standards be raised again, I doubt whether we can hope to see the theatre established in dignity by private enterprise. We may conclude that a theatre is as important in the cultured life of a community as a picture gallery or a library, and it may yet be a matter of pride with every great city that part of its apparatus of culture includes a municipal theatre. It will not prevent the existence of privately owned theatres, any more than the National Gallery prevents the existence of the Leicester Gallery. The municipal theatre should, in fact, bear the same relationship to the privately owned theatre that the National Gallery bears to the private gallery. A certain standard of quality should be maintained at the municipal theatre which is either impossible or unnecessary in the privately owned one. This country and, I think, Turkey, are the only European countries which do not maintain a national theatre. There may be a drama in Turkey, but few of us have heard of it. We know in what a state the English drama is to-day. The history of the theatre is a record of subsidies of one sort or another. The repertory theatre has

been subsidised by rich men with what Mr. Masfield has called "a sense of style". The commercial theatres have been subsidised by rich men with little sense of style, but a keen desire for profit, which has sometimes been satisfied, but more often has not. The majority of the provincial theatres in England at the time of writing are being conducted at a serious loss: they are being subsidised by somebody, but there is no particular glory being got out of the subsidies. Even in Elizabethan times, theatres were under protection, either of the Court or a rich nobleman. We are obliged, therefore, to accept the fact of subsidy whether the theatres are privately or publicly owned, and all we have now to consider is which system of theatrical ownership, private or public, is likely to provide us with the best standard of plays. We *know* what sort of plays we have had from the privately owned theatres, some good, but most bad, and we have seen how easily the standards of the privately owned theatre may be dropped into the gutter, and with what difficulty they can be taken out of it again. It seems unlikely that the publicly owned theatre would give us a standard so low and so unstable as the standard of the privately owned theatre. Something, perhaps, may be learned from the state of the German theatre immediately before the War.

In 1910, the condition of the drama in Ger-

many was very curious—declining in Berlin, but flourishing in the provinces. Metropolitan taste was fickle and vulgar ; provincial taste was steadfast and of high quality. The result of this odd reversal of customary positions was that the German provinces absorbed almost the whole of the interests of students of drama. More experiments were made outside Berlin than were made inside it, not only in the quality of the plays performed, but also in the methods of production and in the interior economy of the theatre. People's theatres were organised in many places, at which performances of classical and modern pieces were given at very moderate prices. The two Free People's Theatres of Berlin, which were typical in most respects of all other people's theatres, had between them a membership of 60,000 persons, of whom a considerable number were working men. These Free People's Theatres contracted with various theatre managers for the performance of specified plays for their members, and the larger of the two, The New Free People's Theatre, was spending £25,000 per annum in 1910 on plays produced at eleven different theatres. This society even started a building fund, which in 1910 had reached £5,000, for the purpose of establishing a theatre of its own to hold 2,000 persons. The members paid one shilling for each performance witnessed, and seats were allotted by

ballot. A similar society, with a membership of 9,000 persons, existed in Vienna. The Cologne Stadt theatre organised performances on lines similar to those of the People's theatres on Sunday afternoons before audiences drawn from workmen's societies which were allowed to nominate the play to be produced. In 1909, the trade unions of Cologne chose Mr. Galsworthy's "Strife" for performance, and this play was received with enormous enthusiasm. A "Deutsches Volkstheater" was in process of erection in 1909. Each subscriber to this society was to be admitted to one performance per week in a season of forty weeks and to receive a theatrical paper, delivered free of charge, together with free admission to a number of lectures for an annual subscription of twenty shillings! The number of "Stadtbund" theatres in Germany was increasing remarkably just before the War broke out, and some towns either subsidised or owned the local theatre. Cologne gave a grant of £25,000 per annum to its theatre, and the small town of Thorn gave £1,000 per annum to its theatre. Thorn is rather larger than Taunton, which has not got a theatre at all, and Cologne is rather larger than Bristol, which miserably failed to support a privately organised repertory theatre before the War.¹

¹ In 1923, however, a Little Theatre, holding about 400 people was started in Bristol in a remarkable way. Members of the local Rotary Club in conjunction with members of the local Playgoers'

I cannot say how far it would be possible to secure support for a theatre from co-operative societies and trade unions in this country, although I believe that some fugitive attempts have been made by co-operative societies either to conduct a theatrical enterprise or to support one conducted on repertory principles. The collapse of trade since the Armistice rules the Trade Unions out of consideration: they are too heavily engaged in finding Unemployed Benefits for their members to spend either time or money in founding theatres. It seems to me, moreover, that the theatre should be a civic institution rather than the institution of a section of the community. The repertory theatre was partly ruined by the fact that it was largely the resort of a clique of severe-minded persons who were more resolved on hearing lectures on economics than on listening to stories. The plain person, shyly anticipating a romantic entertainment and willing to let what poetry was contained in his nature be stirred, found himself bewildered by dreary pieces in which he was

Society decided to experiment with a short season of plays, neither highbrow nor lowbrow in quality. The Corporation of Bristol altered the interior of the Lesser Colston Hall, so that it was made suitable for the performance of plays, and let it to the founders of the Little Theatre. A competent producer and manager, Mr. Rupert Harvey, was engaged to take control of the company, and the Little Theatre began a season of thirteen weeks, the programme being changed each week. The season was so successful that it was extended to seventeen weeks, in addition to a fortnight's engagement at Weston-super-Mare, and the directors of the theatre propose to run the 1924-5 season for six months.

accused of being a worm or invited to consider the need for proportional representation in our electoral system. The story-teller, even if he be a poor story-teller, will always get an audience, and the repertory theatre will not rise from its ruins unless those who are to control it learn that the profession of story-telling is an ancient and honourable one. The drama in England was nearly destroyed, between the time of the Moralities and the time of the Elizabethans, because the Church authorities took it out of the hands of the villagers and "improved" it by substituting doctrinal instruction and homiletics for the knockabouts and fun. Something of that aridity was discoverable in the repertory theatres before the War, and we cannot exonerate the directors of them from blame for their collapse when we remember that they were more eager to instruct than to entertain.

viii

The theatre, then, must be the theatre of the community and not the theatre of a clique; and I suggest that if the Corporation of a city like Liverpool were to subsidise the repertory theatre there with £20,000 per annum—£5,000 less than was given by the much smaller city of Cologne every year to its theatre—it would be doing an

immensely fine and valuable thing for the drama of this country. The directors would be relieved of the perpetual anxiety which haunts those who control a repertory theatre, that if they produce a play of quality rather than one of the most popular character, they will be seriously embarrassed by their bank balance, and would also be able to employ even better actors and actresses than they now employ. A repertory theatre which is not maintained by a rich man, dare not produce any piece which involves expenditure on costumes and scenery, such as would be required in a Shakespearean play, because the cost of hiring these things is so great and the risk of failure so serious. That is why repertory theatres to-day are reduced to producing plays in which modern clothes are worn and there is as little scene-shifting done as possible. Imagine the sort of life that would be led by the Director of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool if he were dependent upon the contributions at the door for the maintenance of the Gallery and the purchase of new pictures! How long would it be before he was compelled to sell his best pictures and lay in a large supply of Maud Goodmans and Marcus Stones? It may be said that if the community demands Marcus Stones in preference to Botticellis, then the community should be supplied with Marcus Stones, but that is a perversion of the

democratic theory which may appeal to half-wits and Mr. Lovat Fraser : it does not appeal to me, or, I imagine, any responsible and intelligent person.

In every community there should be a place in which the accumulated beauty and wisdom of the centuries can be found, for without such a place the continuity of life may be broken and the standards of civilised society debased. We have agreed that there shall be a place in the community where the best books of all time shall be freely accessible to those who wish to read them. We have agreed that there shall be a place in the community where the best learning of all time shall be freely accessible to those who wish to be made acquainted with it. We have agreed that there shall be a place in the community where the best pictures, so far as that is possible, shall be freely accessible to those who wish to see them. We are beginning to agree that there shall be a place in the community where the best music shall be freely heard by those who wish to hear it. But we have not yet begun to agree that there shall be a place in the community where the best drama of all time shall be freely witnessed by all who wish to see it performed. And yet this last is perhaps the most important. I have used the expression "freely accessible" in the broad sense, that the theatre shall be supported by the com-

munity, just as the tramcars are supported by it, and not in the narrow sense that there shall be no charge for admission. It would, no doubt, be desirable for the purposes of regulation that some charge should be made, but it would not be desirable that the theatre should be conducted for the purpose of making a profit out of which to "relieve the rates". The value of any institution which gives tone and depth to the mind cannot be estimated in pounds, shillings and pence, and although the National Gallery is an unprofitable enterprise in the sense that it does not result in a financial gain to the community, it is yet of immeasurable value because of its effect on the community's mind. Twenty thousand pounds per annum, added to the normal revenue of the theatre, would enable the manager of the civic theatre to employ highly-skilled actors and actresses and to use good and sufficient scenery and to produce any sort of intelligent play, whether its cast be big or small. A whole series of civic theatres would offer a guarantee of a reasonable livelihood to the young Shakespeare seeking production for his play. I have already noted that Shakespeare himself belonged to a theatre which depended for its life on the patronage of the great, and the young Shakespeare of our time will need the support of the community if he is to find a place in which he may express himself.

For this is not a time when the individual great can continue to be the patrons of the poets. That patronage, if it is to be continued at all, must be continued by the community.

But how can it be continued if the standard of the community is a low one? I have described a great man as the overflow of a great race. Is there to be no overflow from this race? Are we to fade out of the annals of our people because we could not maintain the standard and allowed our inherited glory to be dimmed? We cannot, perhaps, return to an agricultural system of society, although I believe that in time we will break up these big, insanitary and breathless cities and live in smaller and compacter towns; and so we must do the best we can with the means we have. I believe that the standard can be raised and will be raised, but it will only be raised if those who are faithful to their race devote themselves with more than common devotion to the task. Mr. Wells, at the end of his book, "Sanderson of Oundle", says :

One thing I shared with Sanderson altogether, and that was the conviction that the present common life of men, at once dull and disorderly, competitive, uncreative, cruelly stupid and stupidly cruel, unless it is to be regarded merely as a necessary phase in the development of a nobler existence, is a thing not worth having, that it does not matter who drop dead or how soon we drop out of such a world. Unless there is a more abundant life before mankind, this scheme of space and time is a bad joke beyond our understanding, a flare of

vulgarity, an empty laugh, braying across the mysteries. But we two shared the belief that latent in men and perceptible in men is a greater mankind, great enough to make every effort to realise it fully worth while and to make the whole business of living worth while. And the way to that realisation lies, we both believed, through thought and through creative effort, through science and art and the school.

And I believe that the theatre has a high part to play in the making of that effort.

VI

i.

I HAVE discussed a variety of subjects, mostly of a sociological character, in the preceding chapters, and I propose now, in this last one, to discuss chiefly the drama, the actual play rather than the machinery by which it is produced or the audience before which it is performed. I shall assume that the theatre has been organised more or less as I wish it to be organised, and that not only has each city got its civic theatre, but that all theatres are free from the gambling syndicates which have afflicted them since 1914. Theatrical finance is at last in a healthy state, and the audiences are mainly intelligent or seem to be so in comparison with the contemporary West End audience. Actors and actresses who know their work are no longer hunted off the stage, and have even succeeded in ousting from the theatre all the indigent society ladies and neat little public schoolboys who can neither act, dance, sing nor do anything but look pretty and "quote

refaned". Efficient actors and actresses are not all struggling for jobs in London, but are widely distributed about the country, so that one can see as good a performance of a play, in Plymouth or Newcastle-on-Tyne or Liverpool or Manchester or Dundee as one sees in London. This wide distribution of skilled players is, I think, bound to be made if the theatre is to survive the rivalry of the cinema. It is roughly true to say that one does not see a play so well performed in the provinces as in London. The explanation is so obvious that there is no need to give it. But what is true of the spoken drama is not true of the silent drama. It is possible for the people of Chester to see as good a film of Mr. Chaplin as can be seen by the people of Liverpool or London or Paris or New York or Calcutta or Melbourne. It is this fact, as much as the fact that a more comfortable seat at a lower price can be obtained in a cinema than in a theatre, which has helped to make the moving pictures so popular. Whatever the quality of the film may be, good or bad (and generally it is bad), it is the same quality for everybody: the small town is not worse served than the big town, nor the provincial city than the capital. The high cost of production has affected the distribution of the film to some extent, and for this reason it happens occasionally that small places are not able to see new and popular pictures simultaneously

with their exhibition in big places.¹ But this financial disability is not a permanent one. After a year or shorter period, the rent of the picture comes down to a price which the proprietors of small cinemas in small towns can afford, and it remains the same picture, a trifle worn, perhaps. When the inhabitants of Warrington, eager to forget that they live in Warrington, go to see "The Pilgrim", they see the original cast: they are not fobbed off with an inferior and cheaper cast giving an imitation of the original one. They see Mr. Chaplin himself. Here, obviously, is a form of competition with which the theatre cannot, at present, cope, and some re-organisation, therefore, is necessary if the competition of the silent drama is not to result in the ruin of the spoken. On its material and executive side, the theatre will have to give its patrons as good value for their money as the patrons of the movies receive in the cinema. I have assumed, however, that re-organisation has been done, and that companies of able actors and actresses are to be found all over the provinces. What, in the newly-organised theatre, patronised by healthy-minded and intelligent persons, is likely to be the sort of play that will appeal to the greatest number of persons?

¹ I am told, however, that the scale of charges for hiring films varies from place to place, that a higher rent is demanded in, say, Portsmouth than is demanded the following week, say, in a town in the Isle of Wight.

ii

I think we may believe that tragic plays will be more commonly performed in the organised theatre than they are now, and that there will be a revival of romantic and chivalrous plays in which the hero will be a hero and not a piece of dejected putty. There will, I believe, be an element in the tragedies and romances of the organised theatres which is missing from many of the tragedies and most of the romances of the past: the element of Plausibility. We do more and more demand that the characters in a play shall behave themselves in some accordance with human fact. I am anxious not to be misunderstood when I say that the characters in the plays of the future will behave reasonably. People will continue in plays, as in life, to be incautious and stupid and reckless and foolish, but they will not be incautious or stupid or reckless or foolish in a way that is not reasonable. It may be said that every man who won the Victoria Cross in the War committed an act of folly, but the folly was both human and superb, and the world would be a dingy hole without it. Whatever the behaviour of the characters in a play may be, foolish or wise, it must not contradict the facts of human experience, and I think that dramatists will increasingly endeavour

to make their creatures, whether they be heroic or cowardly, mean or noble, dignified or ridiculous, stupid or wise, behave in a way which is recognisably human. This has not always been the endeavour of our dramatists. One may almost say that it has seldom been their endeavour. In Smollett's translation of "Don Quixote" there is a report of a conversation which took place between the priest of La Mancha and the Canon of Toledo during a walk in the country when they discussed the vain romances which had scattered the Knight's wits. It contains a statement of principle which seems to me to be a sound one, and will, I think, guide the dramatist of the future to a considerable extent. The Canon said :

It may be that . . . works of fiction should not be criticised for inaccuracy ; but I say that fiction should be probable, and that in proportion as it is so, it is pleasing. Fables should not be composed to outrage the understanding, but by making the wonderful appear possible, and by creating in the mind a pleasant interest, they may both surprise and entertain, which cannot be effected where no regard is paid to probability.

It is, perhaps, possible to attach too much importance to the element of probability in a play, but there has not so far been much danger of this. I see no cause to fear that the demand for Plausibility will result in the decline of Imagination, for it has always seemed to me to be fairly easy to

write a play when the author is allowed to perform what tricks he pleases with his characters and is not obliged to reconcile them with the facts of existence. Marlowe was a great sinner against Plausibility, and he constantly outraged the understanding. He had imagination, and he wrote a great verse, manly in expression, informed with a sense of great enterprises, and devoted to the acts of heroic characters ; but he had the faults of a young man in whom imagination is greater than experience and technical skill. His high thoughts ran so swiftly before him that his craftsmanship could not keep pace with them, and for this reason and because he was deficient in a sense of humour, which is a sense of proportion, his work became top-heavy and even incoherent, and his people lost the proportions of life. When he painted a villain, he painted him so deeply steeped in blackguardism that before the portrait was finished the man had ceased altogether to be a human being. Tamburlaine never loses a sort of majestic inhumanity and remains interesting even when he ceases to be credible. He constantly describes himself as the scourge of God and the terror of the world, and has no difficulty whatever in detecting something foully sinful in those who oppose him. When we hear Tamburlaine saying:

Villains, these terrors, and these tyrannies
(If tyrannies war's justice ye repute),
I execute, enjoin'd me from above,
To scourge the pride of such as Heaven abhors ;
Nor am I made arch-monarch of the world,
Crown'd and invested by the hand of Jove,
For deeds of bounty or nobility ;
But, since I exercise a greater name,
The scourge of God and terror of the world,
I must apply myself to fit these terms,
In War, in blood, in death, in cruelty,
And plague such peasants as resist in me
The power of Heaven's eternal majesty . . .

it is not hard to imagine that we are reading the Kaiser's commands to his soldiers that they should be prepared to kill their fathers and mothers and wives and children for their Kaiser's sake. There are times, perhaps, when we feel that Marlowe is too eager to paint the megalomaniacs in a horrible light and to deny them any human emotions whatever, but we cannot deny that there have been such men in the world and that the portrait of Tamburlaine, on the whole, is faithful to what we know of them.

Tamburlaine makes a strain on our credulity, but it does not break under the strain, as it does when Barabas, the Jew of Malta, leans on it. Barabas begins as a man, but ends as a monster, and nowhere in Marlowe's work is the lack of humour so evident as it is here. Scenes which are intended to excite horror, excite only derision: they are too remote from human fact to be other than

comic. The strength of Shakespeare is immediately apparent when a comparison is made between Barabas and Shylock, although Shakespeare uses a reach-me-down plot for his play which is not so serviceable as the one used by Marlowe. Barabas steadily degenerates from the semblance of a man to that of a homicidal maniac, but Shylock gathers humanity as he marches through his play. Shakespeare rarely troubled himself to make his plots plausible, but he never failed to make his people credible even when they were doing incredible things. Marlowe, on the contrary, took a youthful delight in robbing his characters of verisimilitude and he almost went out of his way to be implausible. He had a singular affection for wholesale slaughter. When Tamburlaine made war on Bajazeth, the Emperor of the Turks, he defeated him in less than two minutes after the battle began! In that time, Bajazeth was made a prisoner and three of his contributory kings were killed! When the Egyptian Virgins came out of Damascus to plead for peace, Tamburlaine immediately ordered them to be slain. "Away with them, I say, and show them death!" he exclaims to Techelles, and exactly forty-eight seconds later, Techelles returns and tells Tamburlaine that the Virgins have not only been slain by his horsemen, but that their bodies have been pinned to the walls of Damascus!

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The officers of the Governor of Malta seized the goods of Barabas ninety seconds after they were instructed to do so. In that time, they left the Governor's Palace, visited the house of Barabas, seized his goods, and returned to the Palace to tell the Governor what they had done. When the people of Babylon opposed Tamburlaine, he ordered the burghers to be bound hand and foot and thrown into the lake ; and when Techelles asked what was to be done with their wives and children, he said :

Techelles, drown them all, man, woman and child ;
Leave not a Babylonian in the town.

And Techelles, a plain, matter-of-fact soldier-man, immediately went out and obeyed this command. A minute and a quarter after he received it, he returned to say that the whole of the inhabitants of Babylon had been drowned !

I have fulfill'd your highness' will, my lord :
Thousands of men, drown'd in Asphaltis' lake,
Have made the water swell above the banks,
And fishes, fed by human carcases,
Amaz'd swim up and down upon the waves,
As when they swallow asafœtida,
Which makes them fleet aloft and gape for air.

In " The Jew of Malta ", a whole nunnery is poisoned with a porringer of rice in a remarkably short space of time. Pilia-Borza, in this play,

carries a letter from Ithamore, the slave, to Barabas, delivers it, and returns to Ithamore in three-quarters of a minute !

This is not imagination: it is lack both of imagination and of technical skill ; and it is such defects in his work as these which have kept Marlowe's plays off the stage for too long a time. The plain man will not permit even a genius to contradict the facts of his experience. And the author who fails to make the incredible thing seem credible pays for his indolence or inefficiency by passing out of the popular knowledge.

iii

The history of the drama, or so it seems to me, has been the history of a great effort to reconcile the behaviour of invented creatures with the behaviour of real persons, and yet to keep them interesting. That is not now easy to do, because the life of most people to-day is not very interesting and tends to become less interesting. It is this lack of interest in our lives which has caused so many people, with few mental resources, to seek for a stimulant in the overwrought romances of sadistical women novelists. I do not doubt that the popularity of novels about the South Seas and Cave Men and Sheiks, invented by weak-minded and neurotic women, is entirely due to the fact

that daily life, as Mr. Arnold Bennett has said, is "so daily"; and I can sympathise with the young woman whose day is spent, for the most part, in travelling by underground railway from a tedious suburb to a tedious office in the City, where she types a number of tedious and vilely expressed letters dictated to her by a tedious gentleman who begs her to thank somebody for his esteemed favour of the first inst. or the thirty-first ulto., and to assure him that it will have prompt attention. I can sympathise with that young woman when she tries to escape from her barren existence by reading excessively written romances about strong, rough men who never say civil words to women, but habitually knock them into a state of insensibility. It is a terrible commentary on contemporary man that contemporary woman turns eagerly away from him and prefers to fill her mind with dreams of a hero who is a combination of gorilla and congenital idiot. Romance, which is a zest for living, must somehow be restored to this dingy civilisation of ours, but when it comes it must come in plausible clothes. For this is a questioning age, and I see no reason to suppose that succeeding ages will give up the habit of asking questions, although I hope that they will be more anxious to get answers than we are. More and more, I think, the mind will ask, Why? Why did he do that? Why does she do this? Why are

they all behaving in that way? And the job of the dramatist will be to prevent his audience from asking questions about the behaviour of his characters. It is, I think, a sign of some inefficiency in him if those who witness the performance of his play continually make notes of interrogation ; and the skilful dramatist will have so understood the motives of his people that he will be able to make them plain to his audience without bewildering it. I imagine that authors will concern themselves more in the future with the motives of their characters than with their actions, but to say that is not to say that their actions will not be recorded, for the actions are the means by which the audience, to a great extent, is enabled to realise what the motives of the characters are. The discursory play is all very well when it is written by Mr. Shaw, but it is profoundly depressing when it is written by anyone else ; and that heaven of his, which is a "whirlpool in pure thought", is likely to make the rest of us passionately pine for a red-hot hell where at least we shall be allowed to kick out our legs in our agony.

An author will get little leniency from future audiences if he dodges his job either by asking us to believe that his characters have temporarily dropped their intelligence and their humanity so that he can make them do things which no sane person would ever do, or by asking us to believe

that a great change has come over them in the intervals between the acts. How common it is to read a criticism of a play in which occurs some such statement as this: "If the hero had acted with ordinary intelligence for five seconds, he would not have found himself in the mess in which we left him at the end of the second act. On the other hand, if he had believed with ordinary intelligence at that point, there would not have been any need for the rest of the play! . . ."

I see no reason why we should have our understanding outraged merely to enable the author to finish a play which ought never to have been begun. Plausibility, then, will more and more be demanded in plays, and with that demand for plausibility will come, I think, a more insistent demand that our dramatists shall not misdescribe their characters. The audience of the future will not waste sympathy on a character who deserves only contempt, nor will it permit an author to treat as a hero a man who is really a cad. The half-witted heroine has held the stage too long, and a generation of young women, such as ours, who know very well that babies are not brought by storks or discovered in gooseberry bushes, will not long continue to be content with plays and novels in which the young woman tearfully asserts that she did not know that *that* was likely to happen after she had spent the night in the young

man's bedroom! And the heroine who "gives" herself to a ruffian in order to save the hero from being sent to gaol when she could have saved herself from the one and him from the other by the exercise of a little intelligence—that heroine will not deceive a single soul into any belief other than that she is an empty-minded fool. Our heroes and our heroines and our knaves and villains must be reasonable heroes and heroines and knaves and villains, and the author will succeed in his design only when he has enabled each member of his audience to say, "That might be me!" or "I know that man—he lives next door to us!"

iv

I began this book with some derogatory references to Mr. Stark Young and Mr. Kenneth MacGowan, and I shall end it with more derogatory references to them. These two have told us most of what we know of the theatrical theory of Expressionism. It is this theory, so they assert, which will dominate the drama of the future, and although I disbelieve them, it may be well to conclude this book with a discussion of it. Mr. Young and Mr. MacGowan indulge in vague rhetoric so extensively, that it is not easy for their readers to understand their meaning—some-

times, indeed, it is impossible to do so—and they are so deeply in love with their theory that they narrowly imagine it to be both superior to, and supercessory of, all other theories: in their judgment, the Expressionist is about to abolish all other dramatists. Georg Kaiser, the German dramatist, is regarded as the most prominent of the Expressionists, and his plays, "Von Morgens bis Mitternacht" (done in London by the Stage Society, and in New York by the Theatre Guild, under the title of "From Morn to Midnight"), "Die Burger von Calais", "Die Koralle" and "Gas" (done by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre) are considered to be models for other Expressionists. Another German dramatist, Ernst Toller, is claimed for the Expressionists by Mr. MacGowan, although Toller's translator, Mr. Ashley Dukes, denies the claim. Mr. Eugene O'Neill's play, "The Hairy Ape", has also been described as a piece of Expressionism, but the description does not fit it so well as it fits Mr. Elmer Rice's play, "The Adding Machine". Precisely what Expressionism is, is hard to say. In some respects, it seems to be a revival of the method employed in writing the medieval Moralities, but if we are to judge it by the plays produced in Germany, we must conclude that before a man can become an Expressionist he must first become neurotic. "Von Morgens bis Mitternacht" is a

prolonged scream by an overwrought man, and "Gas" consists of explosions, stinks, and formalised figures carefully divested of any suggestion of human character. The dialogue is written in jerky, telegraphic language, and the whole play is so violent and incoherent that it exhausts the strength as well as the interest of the audience. An admirer of Expressionism praises this play because it contains "no characters": the people in it are not realised as individuals, but as expressions of people or abstractions. Kaiser, indeed, is so determined not to give any character to his people that he denies them names, preferring to call this one "The Lamplighter", and that one, "The First Man" or "The Second Man" or "A Woman" or "The Person Next Door". This is definitely a return to the method of the formalised Moralities in which the people were called "Good Deeds", "Evil Ways", "Gluttony", "Sloth", "Avarice", and "Conscience". I have no doubt that this reaction is very interesting, but I am doubtful of its durability, for mankind is not interested for long in formalities and abstractions, but in useful ceremonies and well-marked individualities. When an institution becomes entirely formal, it is on the point of death, and a drama which deals only in abstractions will die of sheer inanition. What are the works which have survived in the affections for the

longest time and been most widely read? Precisely those works in which some human figure is most clearly revealed in its human and individual shape. Don Quixote, Hamlet, Falstaff, Tom Jones, Uncle Toby, Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller—a thousand figures such as these live on imperishably because their authors took pains to make them look like ordinary men. The Spanish romances, against which Cervantes revolted, had almost eliminated character from their people and had put in its place a formalised chivalry which was merely imbecile. The neo-Elizabethans wrote plays in which human character ceased to operate, and gave us in its stead a surfeit of abnormal creatures and monstrosities who mistook lewdness for wit, and blood-lust for heroism. All those Spanish romances are remembered to-day only because they provoked Cervantes into ridiculing them, and some of them survive in our knowledge for no other reason than that they are named in "Don Quixote". The neo-Elizabethans are known chiefly to the studious and, in our own time, to the eunuchs, mental and physical, who imagine that they are being manly when they are being obscene.

The absence of "characters" from Expressionist plays, therefore, makes me dubious about their durability. In the end, man is interested only in man and not in theories about man. But this fact need not prevent us from examining Expres-

sionism as it is described by Mr. MacGowan. The new technique, he tells us, will be one which

applies to realistic plays as well as to plays of spiritual emphasis, plays of colour, imagination, exaltation, inner truth. It can create illusion as well as understanding. It can perfect the old theatre as well as launch the new. It does in fact range from a beautiful realism to absolute, abstract form. Its one definite limit cuts it off from the theatre of photographic realism. It is always and utterly opposed to the copying upon the stage of the confusion and detail of actuality.

An account which, despite the adjectives of extremity, tells us uncommonly little about Expressionism. What is "absolute, abstract form"? And how is something which is absolute and abstract to be presented relatively and concretely, as it must be if it is to be presented at all? But even if we pass that passage as a mere burst of eloquence which must not be examined too closely, we are entitled to ask for examples of the new technique, if there are any. Is "Von Morgens bis Mitternacht" an example of it? If so, it is the best example known to me of a play in which the author commits the very crime against which Mr. MacGowan so passionately protests, the crime of "copying upon the stage . . . the confusion and details of actuality." In the region of the novel precisely the same crime is committed by Mr. James Joyce in his book, "Ulysses", a work which will one day gravely embarrass those hasty persons who pronounced it

to be a work of genius. I remember that Signor Marinetti brought a collection of pictures to London immediately before the War began. One of them, representing the interior of a restaurant, was said to illustrate the principles of the Marinetti group very clearly. The artist portrayed only the significant fact about each of the persons included in the picture. A gentleman, for example, was represented by an immense shirt-front. The satire was keen, but the artistry was poor; for the significant thing is only significant when it is surrounded by insignificant things: the shirt-front became merely a shirt-front when it was robbed of its background. This, indeed, was the converse of what Mr. Joyce did in "Ulysses", but the fault in the artist and the novelist was much the same fault. The Italian artist thought that a single detail was the most significant fact about a man: the Irish novelist imagined that a thousand details are significant of him. But the significant thing about a man is the man, the whole man and nothing but the man, and the painter or the novelist who cleverly asserts that a shirt-front or a mass of irrelevant and incoherent thoughts is significant of him asserts that he is totally unable to distinguish between essentials and inessentials. We have seen these anarchical gentlemen, whose purpose is not to alter, but to wreck form, busy in all directions. They began among the painters and

then rushed into the company of composers. A little while later, they almost smothered the poets, and now they are upsetting the novelists and the dramatists. We know what a mess they made of the politicians. They have only to raid the lawyers and the theologians to make ruin complete, and we shall then be back in the period which preceded the memorable occasion when God said, "Let there be Light!" I do not object to people saying that ruin is better than order, that shapelessness is better than shape, that incoherence is better than clarity, and that chaos is better than design; but I do object to being told that ruin *is* order, that shapelessness *is* shape, that incoherence *is* clarity and that chaos *is* design; for such assertions are not only a sign of insanity in those who make them, but an insult to the intelligence of those to whom they are made.

v

When Mr. MacGowan stoops to prophecy, he loses himself in a maze of words. "The play of to-morrow," he says,

will take a loose, free shape with many scenes, less talk and more vitality in its production. . . . Perhaps the simplest and surest statement that I should risk is this: It will attempt to transfer to dramatic art the illumination of those deep and vigorous and eternal processes of the human soul which the psychology of Freud and Jung have given us through the

study of the unconscious, striking to the heart of emotion and linking our commonest life of to-day with the emanations of the primitive racial mind.

I like Mr. MacGowan's "simplicity" almost as much as I like Mr. Young's suspicion that the English people have a talent for poetry. I was afraid when I began to read Mr. MacGowan's book that those diminished gentry, the Herren Freud and Jung, would pop up somewhere in the middle of it, and sure enough they did, and there they are, "striking to the heart of emotion and linking our commonest life to-day with the emanations of the primitive racial mind". It is a sad thought that a man cannot now dream of his grandmother without being accused of a breach of the tables of consanguinity, but if psycho-analysis is to become an element in the making of our plays, then our waking moments will be as full of terror as our hours of sleep. All this high-falutin' stuff is either without meaning or is a tortured and obscure way of saying commonplace things. Mr. MacGowan, for example, quotes a passage from a statement made by the Swiss artist, M. Adolphe Appia, as if it contained something both original and profound:

We must no longer try to create the illusion of a forest; but instead the illusion of a man in the atmosphere of a forest.

Wonderful! But does the second illusion differ,

except in phraseology, from the first? Is it not, in fact, a more cumbersome and pretentious way of saying exactly the same thing? We get another example of this sham metaphysic in the chapter in which Mr. MacGowan approvingly expounds the opinion of Mr. Gordon Craig, "whose genius," he says, "has been the greatest force in the theatre since Ibsen."† (Poor Bernard Shaw! Poor Strindberg! Poor Chekhov! Poor Pirandello! Poor actors! Poor actresses! Even poor Adolphe Appia!) According to Mr. MacGowan, Mr. Craig

knows the theatre as a creative instrument. To him it is not a place that offers its back drop as the hugest canvas any artist has ever had. To him it is a place where beauty can be made without a back drop, actor or playwright. It is a place of consecration that takes all of a man, all of a dozen men, all of a dozen men in one man . . .

and so on and so forth. What is one to think of a gentleman who seriously invites us to dream of a theatre in which there shall be neither play nor actor nor scene? I have tried, on more than one occasion, but without success, to get Mr. Gordon Craig to say what *will* be in the theatre of the future. No one has ever succeeded in pinning Mr. Craig down to a statement of fact. He would be frightened to death if anyone were

† This title was given to Mr. Craig by Mr. MacGowan in "The Theatre of To-Morrow", but was taken from him and given to Herr Reinhardt in "Continental Stagecraft."

to take him at his word and offer him a theatre in which to put his theories into practice. When his mother, Miss Ellen Terry, gave him control of the Imperial Theatre in London years ago, all that he could do with it was to disembowel it. Mr. Craig cannot cope with materials. They are always wrong. Either they are too pliable or they are not pliable enough. Either they are too small or too big. The whole universe, in short, has to be remade before Mr. Gordon Craig can stage a play! . . . When he is invited to deal with things as they are and not as he wishes they were, he sheers off at once, covering his retreat with clouds of verbiage which blind and choke his followers. In "The Art of the Theatre", he said that Shakespeare's plays ought not to be acted at all, but in his next book, "Towards a New Theatre", he said that actors ought constantly to be engaged in acting Shakespeare! Then, remembering what he had written in the previous book, he added: "This is a paradox!" and left his readers to infer that anyone who failed to understand it was a muzzy-minded ass! He even went to the length of asserting that Shakespeare did not intend his plays to be performed because they were published with few, if any, stage directions! If that were, indeed, his intention, then he was singularly unsuccessful in carrying it out, seeing that all his

plays were performed many times long before they were published—that, in fact, the majority of them were not printed at all until after his death, and that those which *were* printed in his lifetime were pirated additions which caused him both annoyance and embarrassment. Had he been more eager about publication than performance, he would surely have taken the trouble to pass his proofs for the printers, an act which would have enabled the world to dispense with a multitude of commentators and emendators. But these are trifles to Mr. Craig, who, having proved that Shakespeare ought not to be acted, and ought always to be acted, and was never intended to be acted but to be read, has no difficulty whatever in going on to prove that Shakespeare did not write his plays at all. It seems that they were improvised by his fellow actors during rehearsals, and that he was employed as a sort of superior stenographer to give them a literary shape! . . .

All these advanced, modern gentlemen who write, like overwrought schoolgirls, about the theatre “as a place of consecration that takes all of a man, all of a dozen men, all of a dozen men in one man”, write as if they had no bodies, but were entirely composed of innocuous vapour, without colour, taste or smell. Nevertheless, they are the most materialistically minded persons in the world, for they are permanently occupied by the

structure of things and never with the things themselves. Mr. MacGowan seems to imagine that there is virtue in a play made in ten or eleven scenes which is not to be found in a play made in three well-shaped acts! But what on earth has the number of scenes or acts got to do with the quality of the play? The play of the future, he assures us with all the confidence of a man who will not be there to be contradicted by the facts, "will take a loose, free shape, with many scenes, less talk and more vitality in its production." I do not see any inevitability in the relationship between a play with many scenes and little talk and a production full of vitality. Are the dumb and the inarticulate more vital than those who speak and are fluent with their tongues? They may be, but their vitality has nothing whatever to do with their silence. All this "new" and "future" technique, loose and free and with many scenes, is not new at all, but belongs to the past. The Morality plays had that technique, and it survived in a modified form in the Elizabethan plays. It survived to our own time in Elephant and Castle melodramas, and is now firmly established in the moving-pictures. Our ancestors experimented with it centuries ago, and gradually scrapped it, because they found it was not good enough for their purpose. They began with a movable stage, which they wheeled about the

village from point to point, and performed their plays before a scattered audience. Each scene was on a different cart, and there was a sort of continuous performance. That method of producing a play was too clumsy to last, and many experiments were made, including one which was revived lately in a German piece, "Johannes Kreisler", which was produced at Drury Lane a year or two ago under the name of "Angelo". In this play a number of scenes were set simultaneously on the stage, and illuminated as they were required. The actors and actresses scurried about in the dark from scene to scene, getting themselves bruised as they did so, and on one evening the lady who played the part of the heroine got herself lost in the scenery and was discovered only just in time, hammering on the walls of her prison and pleading to be let out!

Under the influence of the Italians, the English theatre rapidly changed from an uncouth, out-of-door thing with a scattered audience to one contained in a building with a roofed stage, but not a roofed auditorium where the audience was assembled in a compact body. The stage was a projecting platform, and the audience stood on three sides of it. The new theatre, Englished rather than retained in the Italianate style, was found to be inconvenient in many respects. Illusion was not easy because of the unroofed

auditorium through which sunlight and rain could freely pour. So the auditorium was roofed in. Then the stage was discovered to be an awkward shape, because it brought the audience too near to the players, and gradually it was pushed back until it ceased altogether to be a projecting platform and became what we call the "picture-stage", with all the action of the play performed behind the proscenium. Mr. Kenneth MacGowan can scarcely contain his scorn for the "picture-stage", but it is the result of natural evolution in stage mechanics, and it is by far the best sort of stage that has yet been invented. The resources of the Elizabethan stage were not great, and Shakespeare bitterly complains of them in the speeches spoken by Chorus in "Henry the Fifth". (It is interesting to observe that Shakespeare only uses the Chorus in those of his plays where his craftsmanship is weak.) But the experiments were continued, and Inigo Jones and John Shute began to design scenes and effects for it, and in a little while the theatre was completely transformed from the village entertainment, given crudely in the open air, to the highly artificial city entertainment, given in a closed building. The development of that theatre became remarkably rapid when electricity was discovered and cheapened, but there are no certain signs that the *shape* of the theatre will much differ from its shape to-day.

The changes will mainly be of detail, but hardly of principle. And the shape of the play will not, I imagine, greatly change. Our purpose is to discover the most effective method of doing this or that. We do not change the method merely for the sake of changing it. And when we have discovered a form which seems to serve our purpose well, we have sense enough to go on using it, making only those modifications of it which are necessary. The principles of warfare remain pretty much the same to-day what they were in the days when men used bows and arrows ; but the details have changed considerably.

vi

It may seem to some of my readers that I am denying to a man the right to make experiments, but that is not so. What I am denying is this shoddy theory that all that was done in the past is irrelevant to the present or the future, and that we can only experiment "in the blue". Whatever our experiments may be, they must begin on the basis of what has already been done. The experimenter who does not firmly believe that whatever has survived in human life through generations of change and growth has only survived because it is fit to survive, is likely to ruin himself ; and he will be a wise man if he will

prepare himself for the discovery that wherever he may try to wander, he may, in the end have to return to the point from which he wandered. Mr. MacGowan, in "The Theatre of To-morrow", made this statement :

Just as the modern artist has sought to escape from the representative into the more or less abstract, and has given up the technique of Rembrandt, Velasquez and Millet for the technique of Matisse, Picasso, or Duchamps, in the same way the artist of the theatre has passed from realism, even from a beautiful and imaginative illusion of reality, to a formal method which tries to create sharper spiritual values by paring away the elements that bind us most closely to the physical in life and the familiar in the theatre.

Mr. MacGowan could hardly have corrected his final proofs when his argument was confounded by the announcement that the very apostles of modern painting were returning to the technique of Rembrandt, Velasquez and Millet as rapidly as they could. He is hardly any sounder when he discourses on acting and invites us to fuddle our minds with the difference between what he calls Representational or Realistic acting and Presentational or Expressionist acting :

A Broadway actor in a bald wig or an actor naturally bald, who is trying to pretend that he is in a room off in Budapest, and who refuses to admit that he knows it is all a sham, and that a thousand people are watching him, is a representational actor, or a realist. An actor who admits that he is an actor, and that he has an audience before him, and that it is his business to charm and move this audience by the brilliance of his art, is a presentational actor.

Dr. Johnson did better than that when he contemptuously described an actor as a fellow who claps a hump on his back and calls himself Richard the Third! I take it that an actor who plays Richard, whether he calls himself a Presentational or a Representational actor, is trying to make an audience believe that he is Richard. If he is not trying to do this, why does he trouble to act at all? Why use any other than his own name in any play in which he takes part? Why, in fact, have a play? Why not simply walk on to the stage and say, "I am Mr. Snooks, the celebrated actor, and I hereby acknowledge that you are the audience. I will now proceed to charm and move you by the brilliance of my personality! . . ." But if Mr. Snooks intends his audience to believe that he is Richard, he must first of all convince them of this by reconciling his appearance to their historical knowledge. *He must crook his back.* Having begun badly, if Mr. MacGowan's view is to be accepted, he must go on to worse: he must try to forget that he is the celebrated Mr. Snooks whose personality is so charming, and endeavour to make people believe that he is the notorious Richard, whose personality was anything but charming. And the moment he does that, the whole theory of presentational acting, as set out by Mr. MacGowan, goes to pieces. If he does not do that, then he

is no more than a refined drawing-room entertainer, and has no business to be in a theatre at all.

And here I end. Mr. Stark Young once made what seems to me a dubious assertion in the "North American Review", that there "is no absolute necessity, of course, that the theatre of a country borrow anywhere". He was supporting his argument that while the American theatre might profitably borrow from other theatres, it ought never to borrow from the English theatre for the reasons which are set out in the first chapter of this book. I do not, of course, know what Mr. Young means by the word "absolute", for he uses it as loosely as Mr. MacGowan does, but I should have said that, generally speaking, the converse of his assertion was the truth. All civilised society has been conducted on a system of extensive borrowing. The credit system is not confined to matters of finance, and it is well for the world that it is not. Our theatre clearly derives through the Italians from the Greeks, and what is true of us is true of all theatres. Germany can make a far better reparation to France, if France will only believe it, by giving her a few theatrical ideas (which she badly needs) than by giving her milliards of marks. If the nations cannot share their culture, without exacting a price for it, of what good are they? If

a nation will not draw on the experience of other nations, what hope has it of reaching their level? I remember that in that same article in the "North American Review", Mr. Young said that "an influence in order to count must come from a source dictated by our profoundest needs. It must not be a mere parental accident." *Mere parental accident!* God open your eyes, Mr. Young, but the influence you describe so casually and flippantly is one from which we cannot escape. How am I to avoid the influences brought to bear upon me, directly and indirectly, by my father and mother and all my ancestors? My profoundest needs are their profoundest needs, are, indeed, the result of their profoundest needs, born of them and impossible if they had not been. The American people cannot escape from the English influence because of two facts, the fact of lineage and the fact of language. Despite the amazing admixture of races which composes the present population of America, the Anglo-Saxon influence, so heartily despised by Mr. Young, remains, and is likely for a long time to remain, the dominant one; and that is a fact which, like all facts, cannot be eluded either by indifference or belittlement. Our theatre, therefore, must continue for a time to be almost as important to America as it is to us, and it is a poor sort of reasoning which induces a man to

declare in public that the theatre of his country, in striving to establish its own authority, may have regard to the theatres of Europe, but must have no regard to the theatre of England. In this Age of Confusion, we scarcely know where we are going or which way to turn, but I imagine that when our minds are clearer we will find that the right road is the road down which our fathers came marching slowly and uncertainly from the dawn of time. And when the young Shakespeare, to whom I have several times referred in this book, comes up from Stratford to London, he will bring with him a disciplined imagination and a love of human beings which will keep him well in the descent from the great Elizabethan. These two qualities will result in a drama which will not outrage the understanding or rob humanity of its human resemblance. In the literature of the world, the great figures are rarely clever or brilliant men or women, but plain people highly imagined. None of us has any difficulty in recognising Don Quixote as a man who might easily be our nearest neighbour, but most of us have grave difficulty in recognising anything human at all in these brilliant formalisations of men, nor would we wish to have them for neighbours if we could recognise them. The purpose of literature is to illuminate life so that its disorders become significant and its irrelevances are made

full of meaning. The traveller in a tramcar sees a variety of persons whom he recognises as men and women, but he cannot do any more than that until an artist presents them to him in the light of his imagination so that he can see how they are related to each other and what manner of people they are.

vii

But how can the artist flood them with that light if he is prevented from turning it on because the cost of illumination is too great for any other than vulgar exhibitions or because the mass of us do not wish either to be lit up or to see people lit up? We cannot revive the theatre until we revive ourselves. A new and incoherent theory of the theatre is being preached with the maximum of vagueness by gentlemen who are convinced that the play is only part of the thing, and the multitude of playgoers seem indifferent to the theatre as a great institution, and are content to regard it merely as an inferior means of entertainment, something to pass away the time between dinner and bedtime. We are not so lacking in respect for the theatre as our American critics say we are, but we might advantageously have more respect for it. The flower-girl, in Mr. Shaw's "Pygmalion", behaved like a lady when

she was treated like one. If we persist in treating our theatre as a cheap sort of pastime, it will become a cheap sort of pastime, but if we give it respect, it will return to the glory and the stature it had when good Queen Elizabeth reigned on the throne. Out of this unsightly civilisation will come, if we are sufficiently resolute, one which will be as glorious as any that have been. We need only *will* it to be, and it will be.



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